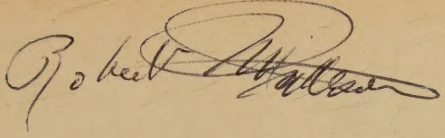
THE GANG GOES TO MILL

STORY BY HARRIETTE WILBUR

PICTURES BY WILLIAM W. CLARKE



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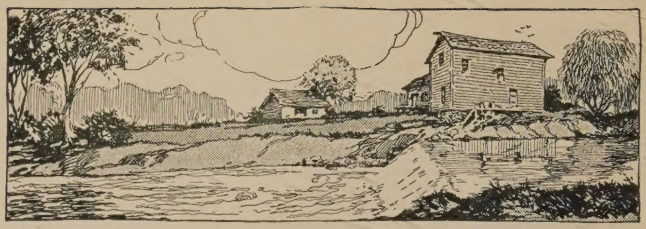

THE GANG GOES TO MILL

By
HARRIETTE WILBUR

With Pictures by
WILLIAM WALLACE CLARKE

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To

My Father

the honest miller who always wore a white hat
turned up in the back

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"Run! Run for your lives!" Jap yelled

THE GANG GOES TO MILL

AN EARLY START

"JASPER," announced Mrs. Munson at dinner one June day, "some one must go to mill right away, or I'll have to buy a sack of flour. I'm almost out, and company coming next week! I thought there was a full sack in the storeroom, but there isn't a one!"

"Well, I'll be too busy to go myself for a few days," replied Mr. Munson, "but I'll do up a sack of wheat, and the Scout, here, can go to mill with it."

For the first time Jap Munson, enjoying bread and brown gravy, took an interest in the flour shortage. He hadn't been in the least worried that there wouldn't be any bread in the box any time he was hungry for it — Mother

always managed somehow to have it on hand. Now he rested knife and fork on their handles and stared at his father.

"What! Me go?"

"Can't you, son? You've been several times with me, and if you forget the way you've a tongue in your mouth. Take Old Dan, and the spring wagon, and Mother'll fix you up a big lunch. You'll have to wait for your grist, but take fishing tackle, and a boy or two for company —"

"Can't I take the whole Gang?"

"If you can find room for them in the spring wagon," laughed his father. "And, by the way, you might give the old wagon a good soaking in the river. It needs it to cure the rattles and squeaks."

Jap wasn't long in finishing his meal. Then off he dashed to tell the Gang. As good luck would have it, every one

of the four was able to get permission to go with him. Of course, there were certain promises that must be made to anxious mothers, such as keep away from the machinery in the mill, take special care not to get drowned (fortunately no one went so far as to insist that anybody keep out of the river), be good boys, don't quarrel, get home safely, don't get hurt, and so on and so on and so on. These promises made, the Gang could gather to talk over plans for the trip.

"And we've got to get an early start," announced Jap, whose full name Jasper was quite suited to the serious attention he gave to whatever he was doing. "It's about twelve miles there, and we've got to wait for the flour."

"Yes, and there'll be lots and lots of things to do, too," added sorrel-topped Reddy Maynard.

"And places to explore," agreed gangly-legged Tiny Long.

"That's the ide," came Billy Ballou's favorite expression, quite befitting the youngest member of the Gang.

"Ought to get off by six, I should think," ventured Windy Hiams, rather balloon-like in build, but nicknamed from the breezy way he said things.

"No," objected Tiny. "Why, that's past sunup. It'll take till noon to get there."

"Oh, Old Dan isn't such a slow poke," challenged Jap quickly.

"No, 'course not. But counting stops, and mebbe asking the way, we wouldn't be there much before nine."

"Make it three-thirty, anyway," was Billy's notion of an early start.

"Three," amended Windy. "By the time we all get together it'll be four — mebbe past."

"If we could sleep together somewhere," began Tiny.

"We could all wake each other up!" finished Jap with a flourish.

"That's the ide!"

"I'll have my watch to go by," Tiny finished his own sentence, and as he did so he drew from his waist pocket the cast-off nickel watch he had inherited in some of the many ways by which boys come into possession of the belongings of their elders when the original owners declare them quite worn out. He looked at the watch, then at the sun, listened carefully, then with a deep sigh shook the timepiece and started winding it.

"Your watch!"

"Some watch that is — to look at. But to go by —"

"Yes, if we depend on your watch, we'll never get started."

"Unless you stay awake all night to keep it going."

"I'll bring along the alarm clock mother gave me the other day, to help spell off Tiny's watch," offered Reddy. "She goes off nearly every time right after she's wound, but —"

"We could take turns winding her," laughed Billy.

"Or waking Reddy up to wind her," was Windy's good-natured gibe.

"Where'll we sleep, though?" spoke up Jap. "If we can all bunk on my floor, I'll ask Mother for quilts and things."

"I've got it!" cried Windy. "Up in our barn! There's a lot of hay in the mow."

"That's the ide!"

"We can get all the stuff packed in the wagon before we go to bed."

"Go to hay, you mean!" shrilled Tiny, enjoying his own joke hugely.

"And then we'll get off without disturbing folks," finished Windy, all in one breath.

"And Mother'll fix up enough for two lunches, I know, 'cause she always does," beamed Jap. "And we'll eat some of it on the way for breakfast."

"Hurray!"

Five pairs of parents agreed to this. So the remainder of the afternoon, as the boys could get together, was spent in making plans, until it promised to be a great day even if they did only half the things they expected to do.

After supper the excited Gang spent a long time in Mr. Munson's barnyard, measuring out Old Dan's fodder for the day, packing up fishing tackle—precious homemade sapling poles and nondescript lengths of twine — pail, bundles of swimming togs, frying pan, safety matches, salt, pepper, lunch basket,

blankets, and so on, and then unpacking them because some one thought of a better way to fix things. Mr. Munson loaded the sack of wheat, but the boys rolled it back and forth in the wagon box many times, according to various ideas of how it would "work best."

"Tell you what! The two that have to ride behind can sit on it."

At dusk they rallied with lanterns or matches or torches to collect a big can of "dewworms" for bait. And, in the manner of an excited crowd of boys flashing those plump angleworms they class as "dewworms," there was much darting about with lanterns and other lights, many wily pounces upon the unsuspecting worms that were discovered browsing quietly in the grass with only the tail left in the burrow to make a prompt retreat in case of need. Gloating cries of "Here's a whopper!" were

heard whenever a captive was held up, a fistful of grass and wriggling worm; or perhaps there was a patient sigh when after a tussel the worm succeeded in slipping out of a boyish grasp and getting safely home. In short, there was so much excitement and genuine sport in the task that the chimes on the Mayville State Bank were striking eleven as the boys trooped down the moonlit village street to the Hiams barn.

"Um-um-um-um!" they chanted, in mimicry of the musical gong strokes, enjoying them doubly because they were hearing them under such unusual conditions. Perhaps in a way they realized that before they heard them again a day chock-full of adventures would have been their lot; yet certainly they did not suspect just what an important part in the day's excitement this same Mayville State Bank was to play.

But then they were happy enough in their plans, without any need of knowing in advance all the things that were to happen that had not been planned.

"My, just smell the hay!" cried Reddy, being the first to climb the straight-up-and-down ladder and emerge from the hole in the floor.

The hayloft was roomy and cool and sweet, and the moonlight shone in through the big door at one end.

"This'll make a dandy place, all right," puffed Billy as he wheezed up the ladder and got to his feet.

"Best ever," agreed Tiny, coming next.

"Tag!" cried Reddy, slapping Tiny on the back while he was still scrambling off the ladder.

But Tiny got on his feet and put off after him, and at once a merry game of tag was on. They waded and bounded

and wallowed here and there in the knee-deep hay; and Tiny was unable to catch his wily tagger until Reddy's foot found a hole in the floor and he barely escaped taking a header plump down into the manger beneath.

The others took up the game, and soon the old hayloft rang with their shouts of "Tag!" and yells of defiance. Then it was turned into as gay a game of hide-and-seek, with the advantage all on the side of the hiders, as they could burrow into the hay and hide in dark corners and not be discovered easily unless they were actually stepped on, or were caught sneaking toward the goal.

But at last the boys felt ready to "go to hay," as Tiny Long stated. They tugged and worked until they had a great soft pile heaped at one side of the path of moonlight that streamed into the mow. They piled it deep, that they

might burrow in it to the chin should the air grow keen before morning.

No undressing was necessary. They finally got Old Unreliable, the alarm clock, wound up so as to stay wound, and Tiny, by much shaking, was able to declare proudly that his watch was ticking as pretty as you please. Then the five lay down, all in a row, to talk themselves to sleep.

At first the babble ran on at a lively rate, for they were planning the day all over ahead of time. But first one, then another voice grew drowsy, faint, died away altogether. Finally, Jap realized he was the only one awake.

And he was wide awake. He rolled over on his back and lay blinking up at the moon for a while. But this didn't make him one bit sleepier. He rolled over on one side, but was so excited at thought of the coming day's pleasures

and responsibilities that he couldn't keep his eyes shut or his body quiet. He rolled over again, bunting Reddy with his knees, but Reddy was too far along in the Land of Nod even to grunt. So Jap turned back again, shut his eyes, opened them, then for entertainment began to tickle Windy's nose with a wisp of hay, until Windy squeaked a peevish "Quee-ee-ee-eet that!" as he flopped over toward Billy.

All at once a funny trick struck Jap. He began chuckling over it gleefully before he had made any other move to begin it. There the four lay, curled up like pigs in a sty. What a good joke to get up on that beam just overhead and come jouncing down on the hay near them, giving them all a good shaking up! Make them think an earthquake had struck Mayville!

He crept stealthily out from the

middle of the bunch of sleepyheads and stole noiselessly over to the wall. He climbed up on the beam, and was crawling along to get directly over the boys, when his hand struck a peculiar little knot fastened to the rafter overhead, to which he was also clinging. Instantly there was a loud buzzing that grew louder and angrier, followed by a sharp stab in Jap's arm.

He gave a wild whoop, and with it tumbled headlong upon the soft heap of boys and hay below, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Run! Run for your lives! Hornets! Wasps! Yellow jackets! Run! Wasps!"

Most of his weight struck Billy, and so that roly-poly member of the Gang was the first one awake. He sat up, rubbing his eyes dazedly, as Jap scrambled off him and commenced shaking the others.

"Hi, what's the ide?" Billy queried, sensing something gone wrong with their well-laid plans.

"Hornets! Wasps! Hear them buzz! Run for your lives!" Jap cried shrilly, clutching and pawing at Tiny, who was as sound asleep as his own prized watch.

The others, though, were awake, and, as each grasped the situation, commenced creeping or leaping out of the hay toward the ladder. Jap gave a shout and caught at his ear, which an angry wasp had selected for attack. But he faithfully remained at his post of duty, shaking the sleeping Tiny and screeching his warning.

He felt it was his duty to get Tiny out of danger, since he had caused the disturbance, and he received a third sting for his loyalty, this time on the shoulder. But a wasp succeeded better than Jap in awakening the sleep-heavy

Tiny, bringing him up with a squeal of pain.

"Who stuck that pin in me?" he roared.

Then, seeing the others on the run, he struck out after them, shouting his angry threats:

"Blame you! I'll make you pay for this, whoever — wow! Say, who's sticking me in the shoulder?" And he whirled to face this new tormentor.

"Hornets, you silly! Hornets!" shouted Jap, dropping agilely down the ladder on top of three wriggling boys who had made a similar swift descent.

"Wow!" shrieked Tiny, and, without further threats, down the ladder he came, half tumbling, half clambering.

The boys wasted no time in getting out of that stormy hayloft and into the peaceful moonlit barnyard.

"Say, Reddy, we didn't need any

alarm clock!" exploded Windy in a roar of laughter. But he had not been stung.

"That's the ide!" Billy cried merrily, for he, too, had escaped without injury. The other three were too busy with wasp stings to enjoy jokes.

"Wh-ew-ew-ew!" whistled Jap, rubbing an arm, a shoulder, and an ear while he capered with pain. "What's good for wasp stings, anyway?"

"Seems to me I've heard that soda —" began Windy, starting toward the house.

"Oh, gee, no!" called Reddy. "If any one hears of this, they'll guy us for weeks."

"Plantain juice! That's the stuff!" And Tiny dropped to his knees to search for some of the leaves of this familiar doorside weed.

"Chew up leaves from different trees — three kinds," advised Billy, tearing handfuls from a near-by plum tree.

"Mud! That'll do the work," remembered Reddy, immediately on a run for the horse trough.

He soon had a soft pat flattened against his smarting knee. The others promptly followed his example, and finally were plastered up and out of pain, or nearly so.

"Seems to me I shan't get sleepy again soon," remarked Jap, still patting his ear very gently.

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

Windy, as owner of the barn, now felt that he owed the boys some sort of an apology.

"Honest, kids, I didn't know the wassips were —"

"No, you didn't!" scoffed Tiny, rubbing his shoulder very tenderly with a fold of his shirt.

"What do you s'pose started them

out this time of night, anyway?" Windy went on, serene in the knowledge of being innocent of any blame in the matter.

"Say, fellows, listen to Windy!" piped up Reddy. "He's stalling. He's the trouble-maker. It's his barn."

"Sure he knew the was-sips were there!"

" 'Course he did, 'cause *he* didn't get stung, notice!"

"At him!" chorused the three wounded ones, Jap shouting as lustily as the other two because they were Windy's wasps.

"Honest, fellows, I didn't know —"

But it was no use. Tiny and Reddy were upon him, threatening to rub his nose in the soft mud where the trough ran over. They would have done it, too, but before they got Windy far Jap decided he'd take the blame for his own mischief-making.

"Let Windy alone, fellows. I'm the one that stirred them up, though I didn't know they were there."

When they heard how the thing had come about, Reddy and Tiny suggested that a sousing in the horse trough would be good for both Jap and his wasp stings, but Windy in turn proved himself a good pal.

"Quit, fellows. He's worse stung than the rest of you, you see."

"Oh, well, then!"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r-r!" came a muffled whirring from the hayloft.

"Time to get up!" chuckled Billy.

"Old Unreliable's been stung, too!" howled Reddy.

"Getting so light over in the east, must be three already," yawned Windy.

"My watch says—" Tiny stopped short, listened, then shook his watch with a patient sigh.

"Moon's still up, though," observed Billy. "Stays up all night, too."

"Tell you what, fellows," spoke up Jap. "Let's hitch up Old Dan and be off. We—"

"That's the ide!" they agreed to a man.

So they trooped quietly out of the Hiams yard and over to the Munson barn, rejoicing that the full moon riding high overhead made everything as light as day.

"Might's well start now as an hour or two later," they said over and over on the way.

Old Dan nickered when they opened the door. They fed and watered him, all he would take, which was quite enough for such an early breakfast. They harnessed him, hitched him to the spring wagon, and got aboard, with Jap at the lines, Windy and Tiny in the seat

beside him for assistants, and Billy and Reddy riding on the sack of wheat in the back.

Then Old Dan was clucked into motion, out of the yard, through the alley, down the shadowy street, and along the gleaming Black-and-White Trail into the country. And so elated were they over their early start that they aroused all the sleeping roosters along the way by singing at the tops of their voices:

Merrily we roll along,
Roll along, roll along,
Merrily we roll along,
O'er the deep blue sea.

HOW THEY MERRILY ROLLED ALONG

Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
Roll along, roll along,
Mer-rul-lee—

So the Gang sang loud and often, while Old Dan carried them down the Black-and-White Trail, now in bright moonlit patches and now in shade, every hoof beat taking them farther away from Mayville and nearer the gristmill a dozen or so miles away.

What an adventure it was, this starting off by themselves before it was cock-crow time even, before the east showed the slightest hint of light other than the generous beams shed over sky and earth by a round-faced, smiling moon sailing in midheaven!

As for Old Dan, he was as unconcerned as though he considered the trip

all in the day's duties of a pet family horse. To him, it was no adventure, so he kept his steps down to his slowest shamble of a walk, except when his driver, fearing the old fellow might stop altogether, gave his long-suffering back a little smack with the lines. Even then the gait he "got up" was a mere pretense at speed, a jolting clatter as much up and down as forward, which quickly settled into a steady walk as soon as his master's attention was turned elsewhere.

That was often enough to suit even Old Dan, for between stanzas the boys' tongues outdistanced the speed of their advance, even making a racket equal to Old Dan's hoof beats and the rattling wagon spokes combined. Sometimes they chattered of the night that was to them still in the present, sometimes of the day that for them had already

begun. Of course, the encounter with those mud wasps that Jap had accidentally jolted from their adobe home could not be quickly forgotten.

"How are the was-sips?" some one would break in every now and then, usually Windy Hiams or Billy Ballou, who found it more funny than painful because neither of them had been stung.

"Wasps yourself!" the three injured ones would retort, with playful pokes intended to make up for what the unstung ones had missed.

"You'd laugh out-a the other side of your mouth if you had an ear that felt as big as your whole head," Jap Munson might remind them.

"Or a lump on your leg as big as an egg," Reddy Maynard might assert.

"Or your shoulder felt all afire," Tiny Long might groan with a tender pat that

was sometimes on one shoulder and sometimes on the other, as he could not always remember which had been stung.

"My, you fellows ought-a be on the way to the horse pistol!"

"Say, Jap, if you feel so done up, better let me drive."

"That's the ide!"

"Humph! I'm not so bad off I can't drive. I gotta get this wheat to mill," Jap would reply to such kindly worded though self-thoughtfully meant proffers. "And the flour back again! And Father said to run the wagon into the river and let it soak good and plenty, to tighten things up. This is my busy day all right, all right."

Then back they would go to their "Merrily We Roll Along" once more, the three stung ones howling quite as cheerily as the two who had escaped those fiery darts.

So they went merrily along for some distance, Jap driving, Windy and Tiny in the seat with him, Billy and Reddy in the back in any one of many positions, such as sitting on the sack of wheat for a seat, or standing up with a hand on the back of the seat for safety's sake in case Old Dan might spurt up suddenly, or boldly pocketing both hands and whistling shrill additions to their rollicking melody, or capering up and down, or even making as if to jump out and run a foot race with Old Dan.

"If you do, I'll smack him hard with the lines," warned Jap.

"Smack away. It'd take a stick of dynamite to move him faster'n he's going right now."

"That's the ide!" giggled Billy, though, instead of trying the race, he leaned over Jap's shoulder and clucked loudly.

"Say, if you don't like my driving, get out and walk!"

"And beat him, too," retorted Reddy with a chuckle.

"Whillikins, yes! We'll never get to mill at this rate."

"Why, we'll be there now long before the miller's up. It's all hours of night yet," Tiny championed steed and driver.

"Look at the fireflies!"

"Thick and bright as stars."

"Say — looky!"

For, as Old Dan rounded a small hilltop, all eyes were focused ahead.

"Say — what!"

"It's a cat!"

"It's a dog!"

"Wow! Cat's right — it's a woodpussy!"

"Wow! Cat's right—polecat, though!"

"Wow! Dog nothing! It's a skunk!"

And right they were, for the little

animal trotting down the long hill just ahead of Old Dan was black of fur except for the white streak either side the backbone, also the snowy tip to the brush he carried high over his back and waved with a warning air as if to say, "Take care — don't come too close!"

"Wow! Stop! We don't want —"

"Should say so! My father says one of those fellows can shoot a far ways."

"Far! All of fourteen feet — mebbe more, Uncle Ben says."

"Wow! If Old Dan touches him, he's a goner!"

"Say he is! He'll smell for weeks!"

"That's the ide! Stop him! Whoa!"

But, though they all "whoaed" at the tops of their voices, and any one who could catch hold of a line tugged with main strength, Old Dan was started downhill, and, as if considering it an easier matter to keep on than to stop,

he even quickened his walk to a little trot.

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried the five, with as many mighty tugs as possible added to Jap's sturdy pulls.

However, the wagon was crowding Old Dan, the breech band pressed firmly against his legs, and the force of gravity was pulling him forward. Altogether it was easier for him to speed up than to whoa. So, while five pairs of eyes watched, wide with horror, Old Dan caught up with the little animal, trotting downhill with him, both as unconcerned as though they had been a dog and a pet family horse out for a canter.

"Wow! We'll hit him sure!"

"Good night!"

But no, Old Dan was too wise for that. He gingerly swung off to one side of the road as he passed his fellow traveler.

"Good work!"

"What do you know about that?"

"But the wheels — say, boys, when they hit!"

"Wow!"

It was a loud groan, made up of five but uttered as one, when the left front wheel overtook the skunk and the animal disappeared under the wagon.

Next followed a loud chorus of shrieks, for the soft June night air that should smell of roses and daisies and lilies was set reeking with that stinging, sickening odor equal to all other vile smells put together. Then came scattered cries, muffled by oozing through noses pinched tightly between protecting fingers and thumbs, so that they sounded thin and wheezy like a tune played with a comb and a piece of paper.

"My!"

"Say — boys!"

"Fierce enough!"

"I'll say it is!"

"Bring on your nosegays, quick!"

"That's the ide!"

Then, as the full calamity dawned upon their senses, mainly olfactory:

"He got us, all right!"

"Wow! I'll say he did!"

"What we going to do now? We can't go back home smelling this way!"

"Or to the mill, either!"

"Say not! My father knows a man that a skunk hit, and the man had to bury his clothes for weeks!"

"Uncle Ben had a dog that got hit this way when he was a boy, and—"

"Say, we'll hafto bury Old Dan, and the wagon, and feed him with a pole!"

"And it made the dog awfully sick, and—"

"Sick as a dog?"

"Ha-ha-ha! I'll say he was!"

"Yes, and now listen, fellows. They couldn't have him around the place at all, till — till he'd soaked himself in the river days and days, and —"

"Now we'll hafto soak the wagon —"

"And the dog always looked so sick of himself whenever they saw him out in the woods, and —"

"And we'll all hafto walk home, and take turns carrying the flour and things."

"And then they clipped the dog — listen, kids — they clipped him and he got better."

In the meantime, Old Dan had reached the bottom of the hill and had slowed into his usual ambling walk. Jolting over a culvert made Reddy loosen his grip on his nose somewhat. Before he thought, he took a breath of "outside" air.

"Say fellows! 'Taint so bad. Listen! 'Taint, honest."

"Listen to the 'taint," wheezed Windy, laughing loudly at his own joke, though no one else got the point until he repeated it.

At first the good news was not believed, either by those who kept a close pinch on the nose or by those who tested the air carefully for themselves — say, with half a nose at a time. But, when Old Dan put a greater distance between his party and that hillside, it was agreed that by a great stroke of good fortune the skunk had missed the Gang's outfit entirely.

"I know how 'twas. Father read the other day that a skunk always shoots straight out behind. And there being nothing but ground behind that one —"

"Sure, the way we were headed, and him, and everything."

"All he hit was the hill."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers and a tiger for the polecat — 'cause he missed!"

"Hip! Hip! Hur-ray! Hur-ray! Hur-ray!"

"But 'twas an awful narrow escape we had. He might-a turned before he shot!" Jap reminded them.

"'Twas that!" and "He might-a — but didn't!" they agreed.

Thereupon, in gratitude to the good luck that so seldom deserts a boy, they raised their voices once more in a joyous round of

Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
Roll along, roll al-o-o-ng,
Mer-rul-lee —

"THE DEEP BLUE SEA" OF DOUBT

Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
O'er the deep blue sea.

For some miles Jap Munson and his four buddies rolled right merrily along the moonlit, firefly-lit highway that stretched away and away over hill and down again, toward the mill. How they hailed the signboards and road marks as they came up to them:

MAYVILLE 1 MI. TRY OUR...
MAYVILLE 1¼ MI. SAVE THE PIECES. I REPAIR...
MAYVILLE 1½ MI. TRADE WITH LONG & HIAMS.
MAYVILLE 2 MI. FOR SALE...
MAYVILLE 2¼ MI. LET ME FIT YOU..
MAYVILLE 3 MI. STOP AT...

"Say, we're making awful fast time," they would shout as each sign appeared.

"All of five knots an hour!" some one would add, or perhaps get the number as low as one, or as high as twenty, as the speaker felt inclined to blame or praise Old Dan's rate of travel.

Then to their "Merrily" once more.

They were finding it a real adventure, this being off on a journey in the last hours of the night or the first ones of the day — no one knew for certain which, since Tiny's watch did not get shaking enough even from the jolting Old Dan gave it to change more than five minutes at a time without outside help. And with no grown person along! The two incidents that had already happened to give spice to the trip made the day promise to be an exciting one if it held out as well as it had begun.

For that matter, this being out on the road by moonlight was an adventure in itself. You know how moonlight

makes you feel — crinkly and ruffly inside, so that no matter how much you want to keep going on and on, following the moon around the world, something strange in the look of things about you makes you want to run back home as fast as you can go. The moonlight alarms even while it charms, you know.

Something like this: You glance out of your bedroom window as you are undressing, and admire the way the silvery glow brightens whatever it touches, and makes deep shadows where it cannot pierce through. You are eager to be out in it, until you notice how it gives familiar things an unreal look, so that you no longer see them for what you know them to be.

That should be the pump out there in the yard, but it appears to be a queer sort of hobgoblin with a little peaked cap on his head, waving one arm as a signal to

his fellow goblins to come out of the shadows where they are hiding and play with him in that wide, open space. You would like to watch longer and spy upon them; but something starts tickling in your hair just then, so quickly you run to bed and cover up well, to stop those little shivers that are running up and down your back. For some time you listen breathlessly to little creaks and rustles and whispers that may mean the frolic is on. You don't get up to spy, though you half intend to do so "pretty soon." Before you know it, you have gone off to sleep without ever being really certain that the gnomes didn't have a frolic in the yard right there before your very ears.

But to be out on a country road at an hour you know is either "awfully early" or "awfully late," according to which day you have in mind, the one before

or the one after! And on a bright moonlight night, when the whole sky is flooded with a silvery wash that spills over the earth in streaky beams, filling the open spaces with a blue-white sheen and making deep caverns in the shadow side of whatever it touches!

That takes courage of a sort. You don't have to be a ten- or an eleven-year-old boy to feel that moonlight is a spooky thing, to feel that it is the time when hobgoblins, witches, ghosts, and such dark beings quite fittingly choose to be stirring. Grown-ups often feel it, especially after they have been out in it long enough to commence to be sleepy.

Much as a boy may think he likes to prowl about at night, too much of it at a stretch has a frightening effect on his thoughts. Moonlight is even worse than darkness, for then eyes as well as ears are on guard; so that it is

twice as easy to imagine bugaboos lurking in the shadows and unreal figures swirling through the bright spaces.

A road that appears shady, friendly, and peaceable by day looms ahead like a long, dark tunnel, enough to make grown-up drivers "jumpy" — and does. Fence posts become dark figures in white caps. Wires are nothing but flashes and streaks of thin, half-living light, as if witches dashed by upon them. A meadow that would be most inviting in the sunlight causes a chilly feeling to run up and down one's backbone at the thought of having to cross it. And in the hollow places are banks and wisps of fog, as restless as fluttering draperies and robes.

"Sea is right," spoke up Tiny Long at the end of one of their "Merrilies," which, by the way, was not so rousing as it had been a mile or so back.

"What do you mean — sea?" queried Windy Hiams.

"Why, everywhere you look it's like you were at the bottom of the ocean."

"That's the ide!" murmured Billy Ballou promptly, as had been his habit for a week now.

And it was, for as they looked ahead, behind, or to either side, the fields and farmhouses had the misty, moist, floating appearance of being sunk deep in water. Beautiful they were, but fearsome, too, especially when the road stretched ahead, empty of life but full of creepy shadows where the trees came close, even to touching overhead, like rows on rows of dark caves.

Fog banks lay low in the hollows, like pools of salty brine; the moonlight turned them to an icy blue-white; so that they looked frozen to the beds of grass they rested upon. A creek that

wound through a meadow appeared a crawling sea serpent; the shimmering trees might have been so many tangles of floating seaweeds.

"It's a regular Sea of Doubt — so hard to tell what's what," remarked Reddy Maynard thoughtfully.

"Why, what do you know about the Sea of Doubt? What hemisphere is it in?" Tiny jeered in great admiration.

"Yes, bound it!" Jap put in. "What country is it in?"

"Oh, songs, books, pomes," replied Reddy loftily.

"Like the Sea of Troubles — that's in Shakespeare," Windy contributed.

"Say, we don't want any Shakespeareses along with us! Put him out, quick, with his Sea of Troubles." Tiny made a playful grab for Windy.

"That's the ide!" and Billy joined the scuffle which made great pretensions

of pushing Windy out of the wagon seat, but hardly budged him.

"Say, fellows, watch out what you're doing," warned Jap. "You'll be scaring Old Dan out of his wits first thing you know."

This brought the boys up short, for, though Old Dan showed no signs of a desire, or even of the ability, to run away, they held the horse in great respect as the one upon whose good behavior depended the success of the whole outing. So that playful outburst was quickly stopped.

"My, just look at the fireflies, though! Bright as stars."

"Brighter than the stars tonight"

"And lots thicker, too," murmured Reddy, on his back in the hay that carpeted the wagon box.

That was true, for this "Sea of Doubt" had numerous lighthouses in

the weeds and bushes, where glow-worms sat and flashed their greenish signal fires.

"Looks kind-a spooky, though," commented Windy.

"Not so spooky as the moonlight slipping and quivering over everything, like water," admitted Reddy.

"Say, you fellows believe in ghosts and things?" challenged Billy, thrusting his face between Windy's and Tiny's shoulders and so joining himself to the three on the seat.

"Aw, 'course they do!" scoffed Jap. "That's the ide!"

"Don't teither," affirmed the two challenged ones; though a bit later Reddy added, "But just the same, out like this, you kind-a feel them around you."

"Even if, when you look, they aren't there," agreed Windy.

After that Old Dan clattered on calmly as before, but the boys were not so merry as they had been. They did not raise their chorus so often, and between times were inclined to say but little. And well they might be quiet, since they had had but little or no sleep the night before, or what would have been the night before had they not started off so early that "today had begun before yesterday had ended," as Tiny worded it.

"My, but I'm sleepy!" yawned Windy. "Cold, too."

"Here, too," Tiny confessed. "That fog gets into a fellow's eyes and skin, both, for all you can't see it close around you."

"Pull the blanket up around you more," Jap directed importantly, as was his general attitude toward the whole expedition.

There came a loud snore from Reddy, on the hay in the wagon box, that set them giggling, whereupon the mischief-maker "awked" again several times.

"But, say, we mustn't go to sleep. 'Twouldn't be fair to Jap, 'cause he can't sleep and drive, too," Tiny reminded them, after finishing a stretching yawn that made him wide awake, at least for the moment.

"Aw, go ahead and sleep, fellows. Me — I haven't time to get sleepy. Anyway, holding the lines keeps me awake."

The truth of the matter was that Jap wouldn't let himself give up to the drowsiness that came stealing over him whenever things were quiet any length of time. For on his shoulders, of course, along with Old Dan's, lay the great responsibility of getting this sack of wheat to mill and the flour home in

usable shape. It wouldn't do for him to lose his hold on the lines, or let anything happen, such as Old Dan's running away, or tipping them over, or turning off the road, or some such accident that might easily befall the party if its general manager became careless.

"Say, if you *do* get sleepy, let me drive," offered Tiny.

"All right — if I do. But I won't."

The general drowsiness and chill and — well, frankly — a growing dislike for the moonlight deepened. The songs and chatter slowly died away. Billy and Reddy, after some playful teasing, curled up on the hay under the blanket in the bottom of the wagon box like two pigs in straw, their heads on the sack of wheat they had rolled under the seat, their feet among the baskets, fishing tackle, and other baggage they had

found it desirable to bring along. Jap and his two helpers, Tiny and Windy, were humped up in the seat, a blanket around them as far as it would go up and down, all three more asleep than awake.

"Why! You're going back to Mayville!" cried Reddy after a short time, and he sprang up in amazement. "Well, that's funny!"

"What's funny?"

"Why, I was looking up at the stars, and all at once it seemed we were going the other way."

"Yes, does seem that way," agreed Billy, also sitting upright with his back to Old Dan. "What makes it, do you s'pose?"

The two boys tested the odd phenomenon several times; and always it was the same. When they were lying down with their heads toward Old Dan,

after a moment or two of looking at the stars, there followed the strange sensation of moving in the direction opposite to that they knew they were going. And, as Billy asked, "What makes it, do you suppose?"

Gradually this mystery lost interest, and the boys grew quiet under the combination of night chill and lack of sleep.

However, stronger than his desire for sleep was Jap's feeling that it was his duty to stay awake. So when his eyes threatened to close, when there was a thunder against his eardrums as if the train to Slumber Land was about to overtake him and sweep him along with it, he blinked and stirred and resolutely made himself come awake, get out of the way of the roaring express to Nodland.

He wished dully that the boys would keep on talking. For, though their

chatter made him sleepy, it was more comforting than this feeling of drifting along alone in a sea of moonlight, surrounded by dim, unreal objects — or mischief-loving Little People — or worse, maybe!

Then, all at once, Jap found himself wide awake and staring. His heart thumped with terror. For there in the road ahead was a — a something the like of which he certainly had never seen before.

"Whoa!" he tried to call, but his throat was so dry, or numb, that he couldn't utter a sound. However, at his wild jerk on the lines, Old Dan came to such a prompt stop that the other passengers were jolted out of their slumbers.

"Wha-a-at! S-a-ay! Why-y-y-y! Got there a'ready?" they chorused, quickly astir and rubbing heavy lids.

"Sh-sh! Lo-o-ok the-e-re!" quavered Jap, pointing to the white figure in the road not far ahead, thin and wavering as if wrapped in fluttering veils, or perhaps as if its body were too frail and misty to more than hold together.

Windy leaned forward, staring.

"Why — wha-a-a-t?" he whispered, in a voice as thin and weak as the dim white figure ahead where the road crossed a little creek.

"Sh-sh!" warned Jap in the faintest breath possible, which sounded to him, however, like a shout.

"Say, what is it, anyway?" Reddy, scrambling to his knees, peered ahead between Windy and Tiny. "Oh!" he finished in a quavering wisp of a groan.

"Yes, what you fellows —" Billy began, and ended as quickly as his eyes fell on what the others were staring at, pop-eyed.

"Sh! a gho —" But Jap choked on the terrifying word.

But the alarming object ahead could not be so quickly driven away. It still tottered and fluttered there before their eyes, dimly yet plainly, like a veil moving in the wind.

"Isn't coming any nearer, is it?" Tiny wondered in a voice like a frightened mouse's squeak.

"What if it does, though?" came Billy's hollow whisper.

"Maybe it won't." But Windy's tone was more that of fear than of faith.

But it did. For, as if thinking it was time he was moving if he were to get to the mill that day, or as if impatient with what he considered nothing but boy foolery, Old Dan started off at a brisk walk that carried him straight toward the — the— whatever it was.

Jap tugged on the lines mightily, but his arms must have been as weak as they felt, for Old Dan kept right on the way he was moving — speeded up a little, if anything. Jap's throat was too dry, from having his mouth gaping wide so long, to get out the slightest ghost of a "Whoa!" had he dared try to call one.

As for the remainder of the Gang, they were as quiet and as rigid as though they had suddenly been frozen solid.

So, while the five watched, wild-eyed and breathless, Old Dan came nearer and nearer that dim, fluttering figure of misty white. It seemed to be waving him back, but right onward he clop-clopped. A blind horse could not have been more unconcerned as to the where-of and the wherefore and the what-was-it of that figure balancing so unsteadily there on the tiny bridge.

"Won't he—?"

"Will he—?"

Old Dan paid no more attention to those faint wonders than he did to the white wisp ahead. He trudged closer—closer—closer. Now he was close enough to touch it. And then, while the boys gasped with horror, he put his head right through the fearsome thing!

And still he clop-clopped right along!

"Oh!"

What a sigh of relief it was, quickly followed by bursts of laughter, even while the boys themselves were coming face to face with this object that seemed to be lying there in wait for them.

For the "fearsome" thing was nothing more than a wisp of hanging, floating, wavering fog, which in the moonlight did have much the appearance of a ghostly figure, if a ghost is dim and white and veily-looking and something

that is half real, half unreal, and yet altogether thin enough to permit you to put your finger right through it.

"Fog!"

"Nothing but fog!"

"Where's our eyes, anyway?"

"Say, we are a sleepy bunch, that's certain."

"Good thing Old Dan kept his wits!"

"Horse sense! That's what we all need."

"Specially when we're in the 'deep blue sea' of doubt."

"What anybody needs when they think they're looking at a ghost."

"That's the ide!"

After a hearty laugh, they awakened the echoes once more with a round of

Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
Roll along, roll along,
Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
O'er the deep blue sea of doubt!
Ha-ha ha-ha!

OLD DAN JOINS THE SPEED-DEMON CLASS

Jap Munson, busy at the lines as much to keep himself awake as to keep Old Dan headed right on this important journey to mill, stared straight ahead to spy out any traffic that might be coming along the highway, even though it was "so early in the morning it's still the night before," according to Windy Hiams.

"You never can tell when somebody'll come along in an auto full-tilt and want the whole road," declared, Jap with the importance due him as general manager of the expedition and owner-for-the-day of horse and wagon.

"It pays to be careful, my father says."

"Mine, too."

"Uncle Ben says so, too."

"And Grandfather."

"Sure, everybody agrees on that."

"Sure they do! The road hogs'll get you if you don't watch out," piped Windy waggishly from his end of the seat.

"That's the ide!" came a sleepy giggle from Billy Ballou, curled up with Reddy Maynard on the hay in the wagon box under a blanket.

But his voice seemed to echo from beneath them, since the two had drawn the sack of wheat as close up under the seat as possible, to make a pillow.

There followed a short silence, while the three in the seat, driver and passengers alike, peered ahead, on the lookout for whatever might be coming.

"There she is!" announced Tiny Long presently, as two bright lights appeared in the road ahead.

"There she is!" and with the words Jap carefully steered Old Dan into a stop at the edge of the road, in spite of the fact that the lights seemed some distance away.

"Lots of time yet," advised Windy.

"Mebbe, and mebbe not. Never can tell how fast an auto may be coming. It's best to turn out in plenty of time."

"Funny looking lights for an auto. Must have green globes or shades."

"Awfully dim, aren't they? But bright enough looking, too."

"Are kind-a greenish, and don't seem to spread much. Mebbe the moonlight makes them look that way."

"Or they're far away yet."

"They're far away, all right, 'cause they don't light up the road yet."

For what seemed like hours they waited. But the lights did not change in the least.

"There she ain't!" joked Reddy, for the stop had aroused all the boys, and each was gazing ahead, Reddy and Billy from over the seat back, all interested in the coming car that got no nearer.

"Must be it's standing still."

"Is it a car, anyway?"

"Might be switch lights."

"Only there's no railroad here, is there? That last signboard was Mayville five miles, and, as I remember, there's no other railroad after the one just going into town."

"Guess it's a couple of lightning bugs bigger than usual."

"We're seeing ghosts again, mebbe!"

"Mebbe. Things don't look the same by moonlight as they do in the daytime," Jap explained apologetically, feeling to blame for the ghost alarm they had suffered.

"Well, come on, you auto! Don't

keep us here all day!" called Tiny Long at last.

And at his shout "you auto" gave up the trail, whirling quickly and scampering down the moonlit road ahead as fast as its four feet could carry it, its stubby white tail frisking mischievously as it darted along.

"A jack rabbit!"

"Why, his eyes looked big as headlights, didn't they?" exclaimed Tiny, quite taken aback at the trick his own eyes had played him.

"Did so," agreed Jap, with the kindly charity he would wish his own misseeings to receive.

"Fooled us good, all right, didn't he?"

"Uncle Ben says they will fool you till you learn the difference, their eyes shine so bright at night. He's often mistaken a jack rabbit for an auto coming far off, 'cause his lights would make

the rabbit's eyes shine so big and far away."

"Just like the moonlight did this fellow's."

"Ha-ha-ha!"

"Get up!" clucked Jap.

"Whoa! Wait a minute. I want me a firefly!"

With the words Reddy was crawling out the back end of the wagon box.

"Fireflies! That's the ide!" And Billy tumbled after him.

"Fireflies!" cried Tiny Long as he went sailing out over the front wheel.

Windy followed close behind, but Jap kept his seat, and his grip on the lines, as a driver should do. No such revelry for him; his responsibilities were too great to permit his becoming playful now.

For some time the boys prowled about the weeds and grass, where glowworms

sat on stems and branches and flashed their lanterns to mark the sides of the road as lighthouses mark danger places.

Soon Tiny came back to the wagon with two he had caught, one in each hand. The boys peered in between his fingers, admiring the insects. Then, as they were wingless lightning bugs, Tiny put one on the wagon box and one on Jap's knee, where they remained signaling as brightly as ever.

"I've got an idea. Let's trim all up with them. Old Dan needs some lights to keep road hogs from running into him. Looky! Tail-lights!"

And Tiny suited the action to the word by clapping a glowworm on each of Old Dan's hips.

"Hi! Look at Old Dan's tail-lights!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" Jap unbent enough to laugh approvingly.

"I'll give him some headlights."

"I'll put some on the back of the wagon."

"Here's some for the sides."

And the game was on.

When the party started off once more, they were gay as a Christmas tree, or an auto ablaze with lights. The boys even had glowworms on their caps and shoulders.

"I guess folks can see us now!" they gloated.

"My, don't we look fine!"

"Fine as Mayville on band concert night!"

"Bright as New York City, right downtown!"

"We won't hafto turn out for road hogs now!"

Nor did they — a fact which caused a happening as thrilling as any they had yet experienced, and was far more important; for, when a loud blare shrieked

out suddenly behind them, and a glowing roar warned them that an auto was bearing down upon them at full speed, Old Dan surprised everybody by breaking into a smart run.

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried Jap, sawing on the lines with all his might.

"Ha-ha! He thinks he's an auto himself, all lit up like one!"

"That's the ide! See him go!"

"Hurray!"

"Whoa! Stop him! They're going to run into us!"

"Pull him off at the side!"

"Whoa! Whoa!"

"Honk-honk-on-on-on!"

But Old Dan heard only the *on,* and proceeded to obey. Clattering and bumping, horse and wagon kept on along the road ahead of their rival booming down upon them at thundering speed.

"Whoa! He's running away!"

"Hold him! Hold him!"

"Honk — honk-onk-onk-on-on-on!"

"Stop him! Things are jouncing all over the wagon!"

"I — can't — stop — him! Whoa!"

"Whoa! We'll lose things out!"

"He — won't — whoa! He's — running — away!"

"Hi! There goes the can of bait!"

"Whoa! We've lost our bait!"

"Honk-honk-honk-on-on-on!"

"Whoa! Bait's jounced overboard!"

"Bait overboard!"

"Stop him! They're coming fast!"

"Stop him! They're going to run right into us!"

"Sa-aa-y! We're tipping over!"

"Sa-aa-y! We're tipping! Whoa!"

It was true, for the auto was fairly upon them just as Old Dan reached a galvanized culvert pipe that was

smoothly covered over the whole width of the roadbed but was thrust out at both ends into the roadside ditch that caught the water. Bumpety-bump-bump-bump! The off wheels clattered down into the ditch, up over the pipe, down into the ditch, one after the other, tipping the wagon until every instant the boys expected to be upset and scattered far and wide.

But perhaps Old Dan's very speed saved them. At least, he dragged the wheels out of the ditch again, and into the edge of the road before he came to a stop, where he slouched down into his usual standing position, as if asleep.

As for the auto, all the boys saw of it after it roared past was a cloud of dust ahead too thick to see through.

"Wow! That *was* a sprint!"

"Didn't know Old Dan had it in him!"

"Old Dan the speed demon!"

"That's the ide! Old Dan the speed demon!"

"Must be that auto was awful near tipping over, too!"

"Sure it was! Why, it must-a hit the culvert pipe just like we did!"

"They did! I heard it bump."

"Me, too! Just as they went past."

"I heard somebody yell, too."

"Too busy listening to our own bumps, I was!"

"Say, didn't we go, though?"

"Old Dan the speed demon! Do we dare go with such a fast driver as Jap is?"

"Oh, mebbe he only had the one race in him."

"Tchk! tchk!" clucked Jap.

"Say — the can of bait! Wait! The bait!" Already Billy was scrambling out at the back.

"Aw, come back! You can't find it!"

"It jounced off into the ditch!"

"It's gone for good. No use looking for it!"

"But all our extra hooks are gone, too; they're in the can, remember."

Billy kept on as he had started, running back toward the culvert almost before the others realized he was out of the wagon.

"He won't find it!"

" 'Course not! It's —"

"Whoop-ee! Kids! Fellows! S-a-a-ay! Looky! Here in the road!"

"He did find it!"

"Must a jounced into the road, then, 'stead of into the ditch!"

"Looky! A bag — a big leather bag!" came jubilantly back to them.

"Why!"

"How?"

"What do you know about that?"

At that Reddy, Windy, and Tiny jumped out and hurried back to meet Billy as he came waddling along with something big and heavy clasped in his arms.

"Must-a jounced out-a the au-to!" he was puffing.

"I told you they got a big bump."

"So did I! I heard it."

"Say, they must-a hit that pipe with a bang when they went into the ditch on that side!"

"Catch a-hold, every-bo-dy!"

"Here, lemme help, Billy. You're 'bout winded."

"There, everybody lift!"

"Hist her, fellows!"

"Everybody hist! Up she goes!"

"There!"

They got the treasure-trove aboard, clambered after it, then gathered about it. Jap knelt in the seat with the lines

Billy came waddling along with something big and heavy clasped in his arms

about his body, as eager for a peep at it as the four who were hunched over it.

"Say, it's a big one!"

"A fine one, too! Cost several dollars, for sure!"

"What's in it, I wonder?"

"I wonder! Dast we open it?"

"Billy's got the right, 'cause he found it."

"Sure he has. Go ahead, Billy. Open it!"

"S'pose it's got valuables in it? Money?"

"Then we'll shut it up again, and leave it be just as we found it."

"Will, anyway, whatever's in it. But maybe there'll be a *re*-ward offered, and we'll hafto know what's in it, to make them identify it all right."

"My father found a pocketbook once, and he made the folks tell what was in it first."

"Sure we will. How'll we know they've a right to it, if we don't know what's in it, to make 'em tell, too?"

"Sure. Let's have a peek inside."

"Tain't so awfully heavy, by the heft of it, to be full of money."

"More likely just clothes. Leather bags are more or less heavy just by themselves, so this one can't be full of money."

"Well, the bag's worth something, anyway. If nobody claims it, it'll be nice for us to use on our travels."

"Sure, then we can keep it."

"But let's see inside once!"

"Well, I dast! If we just look in and don't take anything out, we can't hurt anything."

"'Course we can't. Go ahead, Billy. Open it!"

"Yes, open it, Billy."

Easier said than done, however. The

boys had not had much experience in opening bags, as what little traveling they had done in their lives had been short trips on which they could carry on their backs all the clothes they needed. And, as it is hard to find two bags that open just the same way, what little experience they had had was of no great help to them now.

"Try it this way!"

"No, it goes this way!"

"No, it won't work that way. Mebbe it ought-a —"

"Let me try once!"

It took them some minutes to learn the secret of the clasps and thumb buttons and hooks and clinchers and straps. But by working together, and each contributing a hint or discovery, they made headway.

"There!"

"There she is!"

Then, with the moon to light up whatever might be inside, all peered within.

"What is it, anyway — shirts?"

"Papers!"

"Don't you dare touch them, Windy. Remember, I'm boss of this bag, 'cause I found it."

"Wasn't going to touch anything. Just wanted to be sure they're papers."

"Well, they are all right."

"Must-a been a traveling man. They always have lots of papers along — Uncle Ben does."

"Two — I saw two men, both in the front seat, one driving."

"So did I. They must-a been going to Dow City to catch the Flier."

"S'pose so, only it doesn't go through till after daylight."

"They must-a had the bag in the back of the car and it jounced out when they hit that culvert pipe."

"Yes, like our can of bait did."

"Well, we'll never find that, that's sure."

"But the bag is worth something."

" 'Course it is, even if the papers are only junk."

"Just traveling men's stuff."

"If they offer a *re*-ward, or don't, you're lucky, Billy."

"Well, let's stick it in under the seat, so it won't get lost out again."

The bag safely stowed away, Jap settled himself in driver position once more, with Reddy and Billy for seat-mates, it being their turn to sit with the driver, they declared. Billy naturally felt he should have a turn up in front, because of the honor due his discovery; he took good care to keep his feet on the bag, which he could just reach with his heels when he sat in the middle, between Jap and Reddy.

"All right, let the traveling man sit up ahead," they all agreed, and this of course made Billy beam.

"Say, looky! Old Dan's lost one of his tail-lights!"

"It blew off — blew out — when he was going so fast."

"Well, he's got one left, and a head-light by one ear."

"And the wagon box's got some, so it's all lit up yet."

"Say, lightning bugs are good clingers, ain't they, to stick all through that fast race?"

"Some race!"

"I'll say it was!"

"That's the ide!"

"Get up!" clucked Jap, and slapped the lines commandingly.

"Yes, get up, you speed demon, you!" shrilled Windy, and danced a little clog in the wagon box to celebrate his

waggishness, until, as Old Dan jerked himself into a start, Windy's airy-fairy hold on things caused him to be upset into a backward somersault that almost took him out of the wagon, and did send him sprawling down toward the end gate.

"Old Dan the speed demon!" roared Tiny.

"Hurrah for Old Dan the speed demon!" they cheered, Jap slapping the lines to emphasize the words.

And then, with another boy to add a line as the last one's poetry-making came to a halt, they made up a verse that promised to be popular with the Gang for some time to come:

Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
Behind Old Dan the Speed Dee-mun!
Mer-rul-lee we roll along,
On the way to mill.

TIME TO EAT

When Jap and his four buddies had been allowed by their elders to have an all-day outing at the mill, for pleasure and business combined, it had been supposed the day would not begin before sunrise and would end before sunset.

But their sleeping plans for the night having been generally upset, it must have been about as early as day ever begins when they set out, for when the boys were some miles from home it was still moonlight and the fireflies were atwinkle, and there were no signs of sunrise.

Now and then a field mouse would whisk across the road in front of Old Dan, or a rustle and a gleam of green eyes in the fence row would betray some rabbit or dog alarmed into flight. At

times owls screeched out as they flew over. But, as a rule, the road stretched ahead of them, plain as a white ribbon on a dark dress. It was empty of life, while the farm buildings they passed had a cheerless, deserted look. Everywhere deep shadows, silvery moonlight, and silence, except for the noise the boys made themselves. Once a queer rustling whisper and then a snort startled them, but Old Dan whinnied sociably to the browsing horse in the field and got a whinny in return.

Sometimes the boys made considerable noise, too, as when all were trying to talk at once, or they were singing, or laughing uproariously at some droll thing that had happened or some funny remark some one had made. Again, they would be rather quiet, as when two talked together in low tones, or no one had anything to say. At such times, the

clop-clop of Old Dan's cumbersome hoofs and the rattle of loose spokes were the only "outside" noises to be heard, unless a far-distant train whistled drowsily.

"Say, gives you a queer feeling, being all alone on the road this way in the dead of night!"

"Makes you feel all alone in the world, some way."

"All the other folks in Mayville fast asleep, and us all alone out in this road miles away!"

"Six miles, that last sign said."

"Don't look like any road I ever saw, though, this time of night."

Quite true, for a road that may be followed easily in the daytime when everything looks natural and one can pick out landmarks in the fields and farmyards along the way, or, if necessary, there is some one near by to answer

questions, may be as unfamiliar as a strange road when traveled at night. Even a highway that is well known by day is a different matter by night, while one that is new, or at the best but little known, becomes a sort of Chinese puzzle. Then, too, with all the houses standing there off the roadway, so dark and frowning, one does feel a stranger indeed, even an intruder.

Now for some time Jap had been worrying about the route.

He had been to mill several times before, with his father, by daylight, and so had thought he knew the way perfectly. But now he was not so sure. In fact, he wasn't sure at all, and wished it were sunup, so he could see far-away things better, discover landmarks, or, best of all, ask some one.

Finally, he felt driven to ask where he could, even though he was not at all

hopeful of getting helpful or sensible answers.

"Say? Any you fellows remember the road the last part of the way? Are we getting anywhere near the place to turn?"

"I don't know," replied half his party — Billy Ballou in the seat beside him and Windy Hiams from the hay bed in the wagon box.

"I do, a little," was Reddy Maynard's more promising answer, though he said it none too confidently. But, being also in the seat with Jap, he felt he should make an attempt at being useful, so proffered his best knowledge.

"I know we go along the Black-and-White Trail for a way," began Tiny Long, leaving his hay couch to join the council of three in the front seat by peering between Jap's and Billy's shoulders.

"We've been doing that for miles now. But when do we turn off? That's what I want to know."

"Look at your speedometer," joked Windy.

"That's the ide!" giggled Billy.

"Well, there's a house, with a grove and a windmill, just before you turn, isn't there?" asked Reddy.

"Huh! There's a house and grove and windmill every crossroad, and all along between them, both sides of the road."

"I know, now! There's a road going through a gate and into a field on this side, right before you turn off!" Tiny waved his right hand with a wide sweep that nearly took Reddy's pug nose right along with it.

"Wow! Look out what you're a-doing, can't you?" howled Reddy, clutching his threatened feature just in time to save it.

"'Scuse," murmured Tiny.

"What's the matter? You fellows lost?" Windy joined the quartette by thrusting his face between Billy's and Reddy's shoulders.

"That's the ide," Billy assured him. "Great bunch of know-nothings, aren't they?"

"Huh! How much of a know-it-all are you?" Reddy silenced him.

"Well, watch the road, all of you, and try to remember if you've seen things before," ordered Jap. "I'm so busy driving I can't do all the watching."

And no one jeered, for, though Old Dan was then plugging along at a speed that barely got one foot before the other, they had proof of the old fellow's speed and determination — the leather traveling bag under the seat, the lost can of bait, their own bouncing, jouncing whirl over that culvert pipe. They held

Old Dan the speed demon in considerable respect, also Jap for the way he succeeded in holding him down most times to a reasonable gait. That one burst of speed having lost them the can of dewworms they had gathered with so much joyous anticipation of the time when they would be using it, they were fearful that another such spurt would mean more valuables lost, such as the big basket of eatables Mrs. Munson had provided for the day.

Therefore all eyes were front, whether belonging to those who had been over the road or to those who had not. Presently they passed a house, with a grove and a windmill, to the right of them. A little farther on they passed another one almost like it at the left. Considerably beyond that was a crossroad, and a "Mayville 7 Mi. Trade With Long & Hiams" sign.

"Do we turn here?" asked several, while Jap "whoaed" Old Dan to a willing stop in the middle of the crossroad.

"Well, I know we turn," remembered Reddy, slowly. "We turn and go a way, then turn into a kitty-cornered road, and after a while we come to the river, and cross a bridge, and we can look down the river and see the mill on the other side."

"Yes, I know that much. But do we turn here, or haven't we gone far enough, or have we come too far along the Black-and-White?" worried Jap.

"Isn't the road you turn into marked?"

"No, just a common country road, though autos can go on it."

"But where's Tiny's road going into a field, taking Reddy's nose with it?" queried Windy.

"Yes, follow your nose, Reddy."

"Oh, maybe it's not on this road at all. I guess it's on the way to Popejoy, come to think twice about it." In this wise Tiny glibly relieved himself of the burden of producing such a road.

"Hey, there's a signboard, a big one!"

"Yep, there on the other side of the crossroad!"

"Sure 'nough. Some one get out and read it while I hold Old Dan."

"I will."

Out bounded Billy to read it, which he did aloud, as the moonlight picked out the letters for him:

Free Camping Grounds for Tourists
AT
Dow City
Everybody Welcome
Water! Fuel! Tables! Tents!

"Whoa, we don't want to go to Dow City!" greeted this announcement in loud and alarmed chorus.

"Say not! Must be time to turn."

"Only we could use the water, fuel, tables, tents."

"I don't remember that sign. Do you, Reddy?"

"Nope. But it might be new since we were along here last."

"Gracious! What time is it, anyway? Isn't morning ever coming?"

"Yes, what's happened the sun, anyway?"

"Look at your watch, Tiny. Only shake it first."

"Twenty minutes after seven."

"Seven and past! Why, the sun ought-a be up by now!"

"Where'd you get that twenty minutes after seven, anyway?"

"By reasoning it out. You see, Old Dan goes a mile an hour, and this signboard says seven miles, so it ought-a be seven o'clock and past."

"Wish it was, so somebody'd be up to ask the road of."

"Well, it must be time to turn, anyway."

"You're the driver, Jap."

So, not because he was certain he should follow the crossroad, but more because Dow City seemed to threaten them if they kept on, Jap "hawed" Old Dan out of the Black-and-White Trail. Then they all settled down into considerable wonder and worry as to whether they were on the right road or the wrong one.

They hadn't gone a quarter of a mile when the flash and roar of an auto coming along the trail broke into the still night.

"Got out just in time, Jap. Old Dan would-a given them a race."

"What do you s'pose is all the rush over the Black-and-White tonight?

That's the second car now that's gone tearing along west."

"Mebbe they want to get a free camping ground at Dow City."

"My, just see 'em go!"

"Record racers, maybe. Uncle Ben says they're doing it all the while nowadays, every make of car trying to lower the time across country from Coast to Coast."

"Hear 'em go!"

"Mr. Rowan was going along the Black-and-White one night, and all at once a great big car came whizzing past, all lit up with red and green lights, going lickety-split."

"Say, they're going a mile a minute!"

"Lots of bank robbers get away by autos. Grandfather was reading about them the other night."

"Sure, 'cause they can go so fast, wherever they want, and whenever —"

"Lots of folks'd rather drive by night than by day."

"Um-um, Uncle Ben does. Says the motor works better."

"That's the mist and fog in the air, just like a car works better on a rainy day."

"Yes, and Uncle Ben says he has the road more to himself, and not so much dust, when he drives nights."

"So does my father. Once he drove all night, to get home, 'stead of waiting till the next day. Got home just peeping daylight."

"That's nothing! Sometimes Uncle Ben drives all night coming home, and don't get there till sunup. Sometimes he don't go to bed for a long time after breakfast, too."

"Well, the fellows in that car didn't have all this road to themselves, that's certain."

"And they made a-plenty of dust for us while they were going past."

"Oh, Old Dan the speed demon held his own with them, all right."

"I'll say he did!"

This subject worn out, the boys rode along in silence, once more becoming sleepy and chilled. They nodded, even dozed, by fits and starts, all except Jap, who was staring ahead in big-eyed worry. Finally he spoke his fears, at the same time drawing Old Dan up short with a sudden quick pull on the lines.

"Say, fellows, this isn't the right road, I'm pretty sure."

This brought the others up short, too, with that panic that comes to one who suddenly feels himself floating around loose in a great big strange world, as a new star must feel when first set whirling in the sky.

"Ain't lost, are you?" Reddy worded it in rather a quavering voice.

"Honestly, fellows, I haven't the least idea whether this is the right road or not. It doesn't seem like the right one, but I can't remember what the right one is like, either."

"Nor I," Tiny echoed the frank explanation as frankly. "Only seems as though it ought-a be crooked and wiggly, not straight like this."

"It had, too," nodded Jap.

"Well, what we going to do now?" asked Billy somewhat faintly.

"I know — let's eat," suggested the always practical Windy.

"Hurray, let's!" they agreed as one.

"Time to eat!"

"That's the ide!"

"Why, I'm hungry as a wolf!"

"So'm I — and kind-a tired of riding, and moonlight, and — things."

"Here, too!"

"Time to eat! It's time to eat!" they chanted, and spatted the time on their own knees or one another's backs.

"Old Dan, too," remembered Jap.

"Sure, Old Dan the speed demon must be good and hungry by now."

"Tell you what. Let's stop beside the road at the farmhouse ahead, and eat, then sleep till daylight, and we can ask our way."

Everybody cheered Windy's added suggestions for comfort, and it wasn't long thereafter until the whole party, drawn up by the side of the road just off the farmer's driveway, was feasting — the five boys in a circle in the wagon box about the great basketful of provisions Mrs. Munson had put up for them, Old Dan tied to the back wheel and munching a measure of oats spread out for him just inside the end gate.

When each declared several times over that he couldn't eat another mouthful or, at least, that he could chew it but could never swallow it, they shut up the basket. Then they hefted the traveling bag, shook it, practiced opening and shutting it, and even peeped inside once more to be sure it contained nothing but folded papers resembling packets of order blanks, or handbills of some sort.

"A great find, Billy. Come in mighty handy on our trips," they recongratulated the member whose persistence had made the discovery possible.

And each gratefully proffered his services to help the proud finder get the bag stowed away with the lunch basket under the seat, out of the way of restless feet.

Then, after some playful skirmishing, all five curled up on the hay in the

bottom of the wagon box under the two blankets they had wisely brought along, and in two winks, or three at the most, were fast asleep.

"Well, well, well, look who's here!" boomed a big man's big voice, and they all sprang up, rubbing sleep-sealed eyes open.

The sun was up, and almost as bright and round as the pleasant face that was laughing down upon them from under a big straw hat, as a tall young farmer looked at them over his folded arms, resting on the wagon box side.

"Out pretty late, aren't you?"

"Up pretty early," grinned Jap, as spokesman for the Gang. "We wanted to get to mill early — that's where we're bound for — but got lost, so we stopped to wait till we could ask some one the way. Can you tell us if we're right or wrong?"

"Well, as now headed, you're going right away from the mill. That is, you should have gone another two miles along the Black-and-White, then turned to the right — geed instead of hawed — and followed the road. It winds around some, but keep going and pay no attention to turn-offs, and you'll get to the mill in time. That is, you come to the river and the old iron bridge, and as you cross the bridge, looking down the river you see the mill at the right."

"Thanks," and "That's right," nodded Jap and the two that had been to the mill before.

"There's a little road turns off right at the foot of the river bridge, and that takes you around to the mill."

"Thanks ever so much, Mister."

"Well, it's early yet. The wife's just getting breakfast. Come on in, everybody, and have a bite."

"Well, we've had —" began half the gang, while the other half, for Windy was on both sides, murmured a beaming "Thanks, Mister, if you're sure she won't mind."

"O-ho! she always has an extra bite for company. And I'm sure that no matter when you ate last, or what you had, you can stand some of her flapjacks and sirup. It's always time to eat, with a boy, I've found."

"Yes, sir," they agreed, piling out of the wagon just as so many puppies might get out of a basket when the cover was lifted and some one announced that a plate of chicken bones was ready.

Jap and Windy brought up the rear of the procession with Old Dan for a drink of water and a nibble at the grass in the yard; but all kept close to the cheery-faced young farmer's heels.

And before they got up from that table groaning with good things to eat, the boys were fairly groaning themselves with the quantity they had tucked away beneath their roomy blouses. Moreover, they had hired out to the young farmer to pick berries, beginning the following Monday, at two cents a quart, provided Jap could have the use of Old Dan to carry the Gang to the berry farm and back again.

"Say, we'll make scads of money," they gloated when they were once more on their way.

"How many quarts can you pick in a day?" they challenged one another, and decided that if they picked as well as they promised, they'd be well-to-do financiers by the end of the berry season.

"Glad we got lost," was another gloating remark they repeated often, as they went back along the way they had come.

But perhaps most of all they beamed over the two breakfasts they had enjoyed that morning, for frequently some one would sing out:

"Time to eat!"

Which was always followed by a hearty "Ha-ha-ha!" in chorus.

JAP TESTS AN OLD ADAGE

For some miles the boys rolled along right merrily on their way to mill. The morning sun glittered in the eastern sky like a freshly minted gold dollar, while every grass blade and flower petal on either side of the road twinkled a diamond dewdrop at its tip.

The morning was enough to make any boy feel larkish, to say nothing of a breakfast of piping hot flapjacks and maple sirup to make him feel all warmed and cheered on the inside. Even Old Dan seemed chirked up over the rest and the double breakfast he had enjoyed, so that the clop-clop of his big, awkward old hoofs beat quite a little tune as he jogged along, with the loose spokes of the wheels to play the "bones" in the duet.

"A peach of a morning!"

"What fun to be up early!"

"Yes — after you're up!"

"That's the ide!"

"How alive everything is!"

"Just listen to them go on," — this having reference to the many meadowlarks that sent their liquid yodels rippling across the fields, or the red-winged blackbirds that fluted their trickling "Ok-a-lee!" from the tops of the cattails near and far.

"My, we're lucky that Jap asked us to go along!"

"And that his father let us all go off like this, alone."

"And that his mother fixed up so many good things for us."

This of course made Jap enjoy the morning just doubly.

"Just see all that's happened today, and we're not even at the mill yet!"

"A nice traveling bag when we go again — if the owner doesn't claim it."

"And mebbe the *re*-ward if he does."

"And breakfast twice!"

Treasure-trove and food—what better could they have asked of the good angels that have charge of a boy's happiness? Only they put them in this order of importance: breakfast and treasure-trove.

They hailed the Black-and-White Trail with hearty cheers when they came in sight of the highway by rounding a hilltop. A big touring car, filled with men, was speeding along toward Mayville, as if trying to get away from the curling plumes of dust that kept close behind, shadow-like.

"Say, that looks like Sheriff Meining's car!"

"No, it's not going fast enough for him!"

"Who'd he be looking for, wonder?"

"Not us?"

"Mebbe our folks are wondering what happened to us."

"Mebbe the men that lost the bag are after it."

"Mebbe."

"Well, he's going the wrong direction if he wants us."

So they chattered idly, laughing at their own wit when no one else suspected a remark of being clever. They reached the Black-and-White, followed it for two merry miles, then all burst into greeting cheers as they spied the wooded lane of a road that branched off to the right.

"Here she is — the kitty-cornered road."

"Yep, here's where we turn."

"Doesn't look very kitty-cornered now, though."

"Will after we get on a little ways."

"I remember now. It starts kitty-cornering after we get past this barn and house on ahead."

"Crooked as a snake," declared Jap, partly because he meant it, partly to boast of Old Dan's ability to weave in and out the many twisty turns.

"Mebbe a snake made it first."

"And a snake in pain, too — one that wriggled for more reasons than just because it was going somewhere," remarked Tiny, as Old Dan went carefully down a little hill that was "twisty and turny" itself, as if the maker of the road had dodged wild plum and crab-apple and oak trees all the way uphill, or down.

"A snake made it first, then folks came along the same way, and kept coming, so it got to be a road," added Windy.

"Like the streets of Boston — the old part. I read once they were first cow paths, then people got to using them for roads, and the town grew up along the sides of them, and now they are short, twisty, funny little streets. Just look at a map of Boston if you don't believe me," Reddy finished with a flourish.

"I believe you, all right! Just look at this road!" Tiny joined in.

"That's the ide!" Billy chimed in.

For about three miles the road wound along, sometimes past small farms with fields and orchards and meadows, sometimes through shady fenced-in river-bottom pastures.

"Hi, looky! There's the bridge," cried Tiny suddenly, from his watch-tower position in the back, where he stood with feet braced wide, and with one hand on the back of the seat for safety's sake, in

case Old Dan made a sudden spurt or stop.

"Yep, there's the mill. We're there —almost!" chorused the four.

It was a thrilling little experience, too, this getting up on the bridge, which Old Dan made very leisurely, almost stopping in his tracks, so it seemed, while making the rather steep approach that lifted the road up onto the bridge, enabling them to look up and down the placid, sunny, shady-banked river, from which fog was rising like lacy veils lifted by the wind.

"There's the mill, too," they beamed, when from the middle of the bridge they could spy out the building that marked their journey's end, below stream and on the far bank.

The bridge spanned the river just above the wide, sweeping turn that made the mill pond; trees hid the milldam for

a part of its length, but, though the water above the bridge came so smoothly down, and below it flowed toward the mill with scarcely a ripple, they could hear the soft boom and swish of water pouring over the dam.

"Say, it's going to be a great day!"

"Has been so far!"

"Think of all the things we can do around here!"

" S'pose the miller will let us into the mill?"

"Mebbe. He does whenever I come with Father."

"Mebbe he won't, though, by ourselves."

"I'm not afraid to ask him, though."

"Nor I. Mr. Grannis is a fine man, my father says."

Old Dan carried them over the bridge, which to them seemed a very long one; after coming down off the bridge they

made the right turn that brought them around over a smaller bridge where a little gully joined a reedy bayou of the river, up a small hill, and soon alongside the mill platform. And all the way they chattered and exclaimed just as Columbus and his men must have done while making their landing on the shore of San Salvador.

"Good work, Jap!" applauded Reddy when Jap "whoaed" Old Dan to a stop, and, reaching around behind Billy, he gave the chauffeur of the expedition several good thwacks on the back to emphasize his approval of the way he had got them there.

"Door's shut, though. Maybe the miller isn't grinding today," worried Jap.

"Well, there's a grist on the porch already, so he's got some wheat to grind," Billy comforted him.

"Looky! A man's unhitching now, so it must be he's going to wait for his flour, too." And Windy pointed out a man already parking his team in the shaded place beyond the mill where a flowing well with drinking trough stood beside the road.

"Say, this is *some* place!" breathed Windy, in great admiration of the quiet, shady, cosy place that offered so many attractions — a river, a mill, a milldam, a flowing well, oak groves, picnic places, fishing places, swimming places, everything handy for a round of holiday fun.

"Will we have time to do everything, though?" murmured Billy, proving that he, too, realized the vast possibilities for entertainment the locality offered.

"Hi! there he comes now," whispered Tiny, nodding toward the little house nestled in oak trees on the bank above the road.

"Fine morning! Birds singing and sun shining and flowers opening!" sang out the miller as he came down the path, a big, friendly looking man in dust-whitened work clothes, and a straw hat that had the most jolly expression because it perked up in the back like that one curly feather in a drake's tail. "Up pretty early, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," they chorused.

"You're not the earliest birds astir, though," he added, with a wave of his arm toward the man who was settling his wagon and team in the shady parking place beyond the well. "He got here before I'd had my breakfast."

When the miller stepped up on the porch, ready to start unloading their grist, the boys felt that their day at the mill had fairly begun.

"I can't promise you your flour before four o'clock," he explained, pausing

with one foot on the step of the spring wagon. "Some grists that came in yesterday, and one this morning, are ahead of you."

"That's all right, sir," nodded Jap. "We won't worry about how long it takes."

"We wanted it to be a long day, you see," added Tiny shyly.

"I do see," laughed the miller, nodding toward the fishing tackle, lunch basket, leather bag, bundles of swimming togs, and so on.

The four took turns helping the miller lift the sack of wheat from the wagon box, while Jap held the lines in case Old Dan might get restless or alarmed. That is, Windy and Tiny each caught a corner of the bottom end in their two fists, then Reddy and Billy clambered over behind and also took hold to help heave it down upon the porch platform.

The miller unlocked the door, and, while the five were still peering into the mysterious place revealed, came back with a can of red paint. He put a red 108 on the sack of wheat belonging to the boys, which was leaning up against the wall at the right of the door, then he started painting 107 on the several sacks of wheat belonging to the first customer.

"This is so everybody gets his right sacks," he explained. "I give every customer a number on my book, so no matter how long or how short a time his grist stays here, I always know by the sacks just which are his."

This task finished, with that friendliness that made the miller famous for miles around and kept his little water-power mill doing a good bit of business when others in the country had been closed years before, Mr. Grannis invited

the boys to come in and watch him "start up."

Their round-eyed stares through the doorway at the multitude of boxes, bins, spouts, and machines of all kinds had made them eager to witness this very proceeding, and consequently the invitation caused little joy-prickles to run up and down their spines.

"There's a hitch ring, if you want to tie up your horse for a few minutes," he said to Jap, who was suffering a great inner storm between his duty to the horse and wagon and his desire to be with the boys while those interesting actions were going on inside. With Old Dan anchored to the mill porch, Jap felt quite free from any responsibility for the time being.

First a lever here, then a wheel there, a low hum that quickly grew louder and louder as fans, belts, shafts, rods, and

whatnots commenced whirring all over the building, upstairs, downstairs, in the garret, and in the cellar. Soon the orchestra was in full tune, strumming a merry work-tune for the day.

Mr. Grannis let the boys follow him all over the mill, and you may be sure they obeyed his every order to "keep away from that shaft" or "don't get too near this belt," and that they heard everything he had to tell them about how the wheat was made into flour. From garret to wheelhouse they went, and long before they had made the rounds they were sure it must take a very wise and strong man to be any kind of miller at all.

The wheelhouse was a particularly interesting place, down in the cellar where they could stand looking into the water of the "mill race," as Mr. Grannis called it. Brown-green in the morning sun,

the "headrace" came stealing quietly in from the river through an opening in the side of the wheelhouse wall. It passed through a wooden grating put there to keep weeds and sticks from getting into the wheel, swirled against the fans of the wheel buried deep down in the "wheel pit," and then, as the tailrace, went tumbling through another open space in the downstream wall of the wheelhouse, over the "gate," to join the river again, below the milldam.

Later, when the five had unhitched Old Dan, had watered him at the mossy trough that received the outpour from the spout of the flowing well, and had tied him to the wagon for safe-keeping under a spreading oak, they gathered under a great elm tree just below the mill to watch the water pour over the dam here and there throughout its length, at some places in thick streams,

at other stretches in slenderer, thinner sheets.

But chiefly they were interested in the tailrace, as the miller called the stream of water after it had turned the wheel and was pouring out over the gate, that movable part of the wheelhouse wall he could raise or lower with a lever to regulate the water power.

"Looks like tea with thick cream poured in but not mixed up good yet," Billy said of the green-brown stream of tail-water with its streaks of white foam.

"And looky at the frosted cookies!" cried Reddy, by which he meant the little cakes of foam that whirled slowly about in the pool that lay between the foot of the little fall of tail-water and the roots of the great elm.

But Jap was very thoughtfully puzzling over a certain poem he had heard

some one recite in the last-day-of-school program not long before:

> The mill will never grind again
> With the water that is past.

"I can't see why it won't," he was thinking. "It's the same water when it comes out as when it went in, except for the foam in it. The mill doesn't change it any, or much, and ought to grind with it again, just as well as it did the first time."

And finally, his hazy doubts became frank unbelief.

"I don't believe it, either. I don't believe that pome knows a thing about mills, and grinding, and tailraces. I believe the mill *will* grind with the water that is past. I don't see why it won't."

So, when the other four started a game of "sailing boats" and had wandered a bit downstream, following the sticks and leaves they tossed into

the water, Jap stood there, still puzzling over the problem. Soon a daring thought came into his mind. Why not try it? Why not see for himself?

"Be hard work, though, getting any of the water dipped up," he decided, rather glad of the excuse not to test out the adage.

He was about to follow the boys when he spied something that seemed made and put there for his very use. It was a tin can nailed by the turned-back cover to a long pole; some one had evidently made it for some special purpose, then tucked it away under the propped-up end of the mill where the bank shelved down abruptly from under the floor toward the big elm.

"If the pole's long enough," he wondered.

Yes, it was, and, tipping the can carefully into the sudsy downpour of the

tailrace over the gate, he instantly had it filled to the brim.

With a triumphant chuckle, he ran up the steep bank to go around the mill and so down the other side where the mill race entered the wheelhouse.

"Hi, what you doing? Where you going? Hi! W-a-a-i-t!" the fellows called after him, but he didn't answer.

He scampered down the road past the mill, then down the steep bank above the mill. For an instant he stood there, looking into the deep, dark, slowly moving headrace on its way into the wheelhouse. Did he dare overturn that can of water into the stream?

> The mill will never grind again
> With the water that is past,

said the poem, and said it in such a decided, even solemn, warning way that Jap felt rather frightened over what he was about to do.

"Huh! it can't hurt anything, that I can see," the bold, venturesome half of his mind assured the timid, hesitating half.

And then, with a sly, mischievous grin over the trick he was playing on the poet, he slowly turned the can bottom side up over the mill race.

"Now you'll have to grind with the water that has passed," he warned the mill.

But, just as the water from the can splashed into the stream, a terrible thought darted into his mind, one that made him sick and dizzy with fear and dismay.

"What if it won't grind? What if there'll be an explosion or something! Oh, I wish I hadn't meddled!"

And the miller! In the midst of all that heavy machinery! Oh, oh! What would he do now? In the haymow

there, by just climbing up on a rafter to play a trick on the boys, he had set loose a flock of angry wasps. Suppose that in his desire to play a trick on the poet he had started something that would cause trouble in the mill? There was so much machinery there — and mebbe —!

A flood of unreasoning, blind, helpless fear swept over him, just as when he was a smaller boy some imaginary horror would send him running to his father for protection. He was cold and stiff with fright. Little pin pricks were stabbing him all over his body. Most of all, he felt a sudden wild desire to take to his heels and run up the bank and away from the mill as fast as his whirring legs would carry him. But the grown-up part of him was even stronger, urging him to do what he could to repair his mischief.

So he darted up the bank, dropping the pole as he ran. Around the corner of the mill he came full tilt, and sprang upon the platform, where the Gang had gathered near the doorway, looking for him.

"Say, where you been?" "What's the hurry?" "Where you going?" "What's the matter?" they hailed him.

But Jap didn't stop to explain to them.

"Run! Run for your lives!" he yelled, and dashed through the door.

"Run, Mr. Grannis, run!" he shrieked, and caught the miller by the sleeve as he bent over a sack of grain to empty it into a bin.

"Run? What for? Some one hurt? Something afire?" asked the miller, following him to the door.

"Hurry! Get away from the mill, quick, everybody!"

Jap scurried up the bank toward the miller's house, followed by his four buddies and Mr. Grannis. He turned and faced the mill, expecting that at any instant the unknown but dreadful something he feared would begin, though as yet the machinery was humming busily and contentedly away to itself as though no accident threatened. While waiting for that event, Jap hastily explained what he had done, and why, and what he feared.

Then the explosion did come, though not in the way Jap had expected. It was the miller, laughing heartily. But, when Mr. Grannis saw the shame that began to sweep over Jap when he sensed that he had just done something very silly and childish, the miller quickly straightened his face.

"Listen, bub," he said, placing his hands kindly on Jap's shoulders. "The

poet told the truth, in a way, for he was only thinking that the water goes through the mill race, turning the wheel as it goes, then joins the river and flows on and on, till at last it reaches the sea. For, of course, he was only trying in his poetical way to say that the water cannot flow backward, cannot turn around and go through the wheel again. But, as you see, all water is the same to a mill wheel, if it can only get it back again."

Then, as the boys began to giggle a bit over Jap's funny mistake, he added: "But remember, too, boys, there is a real lesson in the poem. It's this: Just as water cannot flow uphill, or back over the gate into the wheel pit, so time cannot come back, either. We ought to do our work well every day, our very best every minute, for the same day and the same minute never come back. Even

if you'd stop the clock, or even turn the hands back, the days, minutes, hours, weeks, months, and years would go on just the same. So, boys, what if there's something you should do, like studying lessons or learning to do your tasks?"

And the miller's kind eyes questioned each in turn. Then he answered his own question for them: "Well, like the mill, you can't expect to have more than one chance at the same water, so to speak, so that's the time for you to say to yourselves:

As the mill can almost never grind
With water that is past,
So we must daily do our best,
For time won't always last.

"Hurray!" they applauded the miller's little verse.

"Oh, thank Mr. Munson here for the lesson," laughed Mr. Grannis, and went back to the mill.

"Aw, I don't care if I was a ninny," murmured Jap, feeling far more pride over that "Mr. Munson" than he felt shame over his silly fears.

"Ninny nothing! You were awfully smart to think of it all." And Tiny gave him a good, resounding slap on the shoulder. "Me — I never thought of any poetry when I was looking at the water."

"Sure you were a smart one to think that out — explosion and all!"

"Me neither!"

"Ninny nothing!"

"That's the ide!" they assured him loyally.

Then, complimenting the miller, they singsonged his bit of verse while marching up the road five abreast:

As the mill can almost never grind
With water that is past,
So we must daily do our best,
For time won't always last.

BILLY'S BEE TREE

The Gang, jogging down the steep bank just above the mill, agreed that this was a great place, and that it should be a great day.

There was the mill itself, whose busy whirr was a delightful work song, whether one heard it at close range, as from the doorway or even inside close up to the quivering machinery, or listened to it from across open spaces, as on the river bank below, when it came muffled and drowsy but not drowned in the roaring crash of falling waters. There was the boiling tailrace that tumbled over the low gate at the lower side of the wheel pit, foaming and frothing with the work of turning the flanged wheel it had found lying deep in its path. There was the gliding downpour

of the spillway that flowed over the long milldam, stretching from wheelhouse to the opposite river bank.

"Looks like sirup pouring out of a pan, the way it slips along over the dam!" shouted Windy, to be heard, watching the stream from above as it made its take-off over the crest.

"A regular Niagara Falls," nodded Tiny.

For a bit the boys were content to stand there on the bank, watching the unhurrying but ever-moving water, a little branch of which, the mill race, went flowing into the wheelhouse to furnish power for the mill, while the broadest part of the stream poured over the milldam without doing any work at all.

"I know why they put the mill right here," discovered Reddy. "Looky! The river comes down under the big bridge

over there with the current in the middle; then, when it strikes the curve in this bank up beyond there, the current keeps to this side of the mill pond, and that makes the tailrace keep moving because it is part of the current."

"Good work," applauded the boys, patting the cloth-capped, sorrel-curly head that had thought out the problem.

"Pretty deep right here, too," observed Jap, pointing to the mill race that swept along at his feet.

"If you'd fall in, there'd be an explosion all right," tittered Tiny, which made the others laugh, including Jap, though he did it rather shamefacedly.

"Aw, don't keep rubbing that in, fellows," he pleaded.

"All right."

"That grating inside would catch you before you got to the mill wheel, like it does weeds and sticks," giggled Reddy.

"Say, when we going in swimming?" piped up Billy.

"Oh, let's wait till we get warm."

"Let's."

"Come on, fellows. Let's get to work having fun."

Soon they started a game of sending boats over the milldam, the boats being any piece of floating material they could find washed up along the bank.

"Hurray!" they would shout, when a "boat" hovered on the very crest of the downpour, as if hesitating to take its unavoidable plunge. "Over goes Blondin!" — forgetting that Blondin crossed Niagara on a tight rope stretched over the falls, not in a boat or even in a barrel, though this latter feat has been tried several times, but always disastrously.

As a part of the game was to start the boats as far upstream as possible,

the boys gradually worked up the bank of the mill pond, toward the little bridge that spanned the gully emptying into the river at about the center of its outermost bend. Finally they were all gathered on a half-sunny, half-shady plot of grassy bank, with debris enough at their feet to keep the game going for as long a time as they would care to play it. And, of course, that was just the point for somebody to suggest something else for entertainment, though for the time being every one seemed quite content just to sit there, tossing chips or not even making that much exertion.

"Any of you fellows know a bee tree when you see it?" asked Billy suddenly.

He was lying on his back, looking up into the big elm whose green branches sprayed fountainwise around its trunk.

"I don't," answered half of his buddies — Jap and Reddy.

"Do you?" parried the other half — Windy and Tiny.

"Has to be a hollow tree, doesn't it?"

"Has to have a big wart on it, doesn't it?"

"Do the bees make the wart to put their honey in?"

"Or do they use the tree because the wart is already there?"

"Why, do you see one?"

"Where is it, anyway?"

Billy waited calmly for the flood of questions to pour over him, like so much sweet sirup of flattery trickling over his pride.

"No, I don't see one, but it would be fine if we could find one and get the honey and take it home, wouldn't it?"

"Say, it would that!" Windy jumped to his feet and commenced peering up at the various trees roundabout. "See any bee warts?"

"That's the ide!" Billy assured him, though his own search only brought him to a sitting position.

"Huh! How'd you get it without getting stung?" put in practical Reddy just then, and it was like a damper on the fire of enthusiasm. "Should think we'd met up with about all the stingers we want to for some time to come."

"Wow, yes!" howled Jap and Tiny, rubbing ears and legs and shoulders still tender from jabs the angry wasps had given them the night before.

"Say, fellows, lemme tell you about a funny beehive I saw last summer when I was at Grandfather's," began Reddy, with such vim that at once he had the attention of the other four, never so very easily won for long at a time.

For once they were willing to loll back on the grass and listen.

"Well, Grandfather drove into a yard one day to see a man about some pigs. I kept hearing bees humming around, but couldn't see any hives. And what do you think? When I looked some more, where the sound came from the loudest, I saw bees, hundreds of them, around one side of the house! The man saw me looking at them, and said that a swarm of bees was hiving there."

"In the house?"

"Wow! And folks lived there, too?"

"Yes-sir-ee! They'd found a crack where a board had splintered off near the corner of the house, and they were using the space between the walls for a hive. The man said when he thought they had enough honey to pay for the trouble, he'd smoke 'em up enough to tame them, then he'd take the boards off along that side of the house and get the honey."

"I suppose they could hive there," murmured Windy, half doubting, half believing.

"Why, sure they could — and did! Why, the bees were just thick, going and coming, just as though it was a really, truly hive."

"But didn't they sting the folks?"

"The man said the bees didn't sting any of them because they never meddled with the bees, and, anyway, he said bees can smell so keen they can tell home folks from strangers that way!"

"Ha — ha! Fly up and sniff folks to tell if they belong around the place or not!"

"Must have good smellers!"

"Why, course they have. Just see how they can tell flowers far off!"

"My grandfather says that's the reason bees start stinging folks — they don't like their smell."

"Uncle Ben says that, after one bee gets mad and stings a person, the bees around smell that stinger juice and that excites them all, and then before they know it they all start buzzing and stinging."

"Stinger juice!"

"Sure! — It's got poison in it, and the other bees can smell it a far ways, and will come running up to get into the fight."

"Sure they will! Why, this man that had bees in his house said they pitched on to a tramp one day and drove him out of the yard."

"Ha-ha! Course they could smell the tramp far enough!"

"And the man said he guessed he'd keep the swarm there all the time, for watchdogs, to keep tramps away."

"I wouldn't go near them," declared Jap, gently rubbing his ear.

"Oh, well, I don't mind bees. Nor wassips either. They don't sting *me!*" boasted Windy. And, remembering that he had escaped the angry wasps in the haymow, the boys were inclined to believe that he was stingproof.

"Huh! Your hide's too tough; a stinger'd just break off in it!" scoffed Reddy.

"That's the ide!" giggled Billy.

"Oh, they just happened to miss you two," scoffed Tiny.

"Huh! I guess if you'd been the nearest to them, they'd a got your ear just as they did mine," Jap joined in.

"Come on, let's go up the river farther — see where that little gully goes to," suggested Windy, for more reasons than one.

The crowd started slowly along the narrow path in Windy's wake, Billy at the very tail of the Indian file.

But soon Billy dropped back a bit, giggling secretly in great glee. For it had come to him that he could play a good trick on the boys, make them think he'd found a bee tree, and get some of them to climb up after the honey. None of them seemed to know just what a bee tree looked like; for that matter, Billy didn't, but the questions about a wart on such a tree had given him an idea. It would be easy to fool them.

"That's the ide!" he assured himself, and clapped his thighs with delight over the brilliant notion.

But how? Oh, easy enough. He'd climb up a tree and put his dark gray cap up on the trunk, in the shadow, so it would look like a bulge in the bark. They'd take it for a bee swelling, and have their mouths all made up for honey. And what a joke when they found it was only his cap! He'd get it

up there, then come down and call the boys, and be looking up into the tree when they came hurrying up.

"That's the ide!" he rejoiced.

Soon he had clambered to a place where he could hang his cap on a little snag just where two branches forked, so it could be seen from the ground between the lower limbs, but only half seen, in the shadows and at that height, and not for what it really was.

"That's the ide!" he gloated, when he had it fixed to his satisfaction.

Then he started back toward the ground. But just as he was making ready to drop from the lowest branch his heart stood still. For all at once a roar of loud shouts and barks broke out close behind him.

"Here you! What you doing there! Sic 'em, Tige, sic 'em! I'll teach you to rob my bee tree!"

"Woof-woof-woof-oof-oof-oof!"

Dangling by his arms just a few feet from the ground, Billy was in an agony of fear, expecting any minute that he'd be in bodily pain from man or dog, or both. He couldn't see what was going on behind him. But the eyes of his imagination were working most keenly, and with them he saw an angry man with a club, and a fierce, open-mouthed dog, all ready to pounce upon him.

What to do? He couldn't drop right down into the dog's jaws, but he was too far out from the trunk to climb back again to a safe perch in the tree. Under the conditions, surrender was the only thing he could think of.

"Say, mister, call off your dog! Honestly, I didn't know it was a bee tree! I thought—" yelled Billy, and kicked out with all his might to keep the savage barker from becoming a still

more savage biter. Barking dogs do bite at times like this, Billy felt certain.

"All right," boomed the heavy voice. "Only, when you light, you start running and don't stop. Down, Tige, down! Now drop, then run!"

Billy did both. He hit the ground running, in fact, and kept right on the way he was headed, which was up the steep bank toward the road.

Then to his horror bursts of loud laughter broke out behind him — familiar laughter he had often heard in the past, and had many times joined in himself. 'Twas the Gang!

The practical joker had been practical-joked himself, good and plenty. Billy stopped short, and whirled in his tracks to face the four, all doubled over, holding their sides in an uproar of merriment.

"Sic 'em, sic 'em!" roared Tiny in deep growling tones, through cupped hands.

"Woof-woof-oof!" answered Reddy, between roars.

Neither would have fooled anybody but a boy taken by surprise while engaged in a stealthy bit of mischief-making. Even though Billy's mischief had been of an innocent sort, his desire for secrecy about it had keyed him up to such a pitch of excitement that his reason was put quite off guard. But, burning with shame at having been fooled so easily and completely, be tried to pass it off lightly and airily.

"Say, what's the ide, anyway?"

"Ho-ho, you got it, all right!"

"Yes-sir-ee! You got the ide, quick enough!"

"Drop and start running — don't stop!" bellowed Tiny.

"Woof-woof-oof!" taunted Reddy.

"Reddy saw you sneaking back here, so we peeked through the bushes and watched you."

"And when we saw you starting down, we sneaked up behind you."

"Yes. Where's your cap?"

"Stung!" admitted Billy, with a sheepish little grin.

"That's the ide!" chorused the four with resounding knee-slaps and loud roars.

"Now, bub," boomed Tiny's bass, when he could stop laughing long enough to get his mouth into speaking position, "go back up there and get your cap! Down, Tige! Let bub there get his cap — that's a good dog!"

"Ki-yi-yi-yip!" yodeled Reddy, in the most disappointed dog wail imaginable, and he dropped to the ground, head between his hands, howling mournfully,

as a dog would certainly do when cheated of a good bone, or a tidbit of juicy boy.

"Huh! Think you're smart, don't you?" grunted Billy, digging his toes into the ground and trying to think of some way to put a stop to their taunting jibes.

Soon an inspiration came, as it always does sooner or later to a boy that earnestly desires to "save his face."

"Tell you what, fellows. You can't any of you knock my cap out of that crotch with stones, three throws apiece!"

"That's the ide!" they laughed, accepting his challenge in his own favorite expression, which, he felt, he would never want to use again, and which, to tell the truth, he never did — though for some time he had to bite the words off in the middle of a good start to keep from saying it.

At once the new game was on. But so cosily was his cap stuck on that snag, and so well was it protected by branches above, below, and on all sides, that, after a dozen carefully aimed stones had failed to dislodge it, Billy had to find a long pole and fish it down himself.

"Well, let's get to work fishing," suggested Tiny, after Billy had retrieved his cap from his bee tree and they had laughed themselves out at his expense. "Time we got at it," he added for emphasis, consulting his watch, but evidently disappointed in what it had to tell him, for he shook it and listened to it without announcing the hour.

"What we going to do for bait?" asked Jap as the five made their way around the mill toward their pile of belongings parked under a tree on the bank near where Old Dan browsed at the end of a long rope.

"Yes, what we going to do for bait?" wondered Reddy.

"Dig some more," answered Windy. "Ought-a be lots of bait around here."

"That's the — er, I mean — sure!" agreed Billy, in a way that made them all titter once more.

"Say, just kick over a stone and catch what runs out," suggested Tiny.

"That's the ide!" agreed Windy, mischievously finishing Billy's favorite expression for him.

"We'll never find such nice, big, fat, juicy fellows as those dewworms we lost, though," mourned Jap.

"My! but weren't they whoppers, though?" Tiny chimed in. "The fish'd-a just gobbled them down in a hurry, I'm sure."

"Say, quit it. You make them sound good enough to eat themselves!"

"Yes, stop it or you'll have me hungry."

"They sure were whoppers," repeated Tiny with great enthusiasm.

"Sure were," agreed the four, and

quite rightly, too; for, as the old saying runs, it isn't until we lose a thing that we understand just how valuable it is, though the adage puts it in these words: "Blessings brighten as they take their flight."

"Hi, looky! Looky!"

The four rushed over to where Billy hovered, in squatting position, gazing proudly down upon the place where a flat stone had rested.

"Dewworms! Big fat ones! Hurray! Grab 'em quick! Hold on tight."

Of course, some of the wriggling angleworms, tough and quick as stretched rubber cord, were able to escape in dens made for just this purpose, with a taunting flirt of a tail tip for farewell. But, by making a quick clutch, and twisting the fingers around the length of worm as well as grasping it tightly, more than one boy was able

to pull his unwilling and struggling captive out of the ground.

"Here's a beauty," exulted Tiny, holding a thick, long worm between finger and thumb and dangling it in the air, as a girl would admire a string of cherries or currants or other dainty tidbit, but never an angleworm, no matter how dewwormy it might be.

"Broke mine in two," muttered Jap, shaking the stub of worm he had managed to collect free from the grass and mold he had clutched with the retreating animal.

"Come on, fellows!" shouted Windy, noisy with his bright idea. "They'll be thick up here around the well."

"Hurray! Now you've got it! That's the — sure!"

And the Gang followed pell-mell at Windy's heels, up to where the drinking trough made the ground moist and

oozy all about it. For the overflow that trickled down the mossy sides of the wooden tank kept the stones thereabouts glistening and the ground in summer-shower condition — just the ideal spot for dewworms.

They were found in plenty, too, until Tiny's handkerchief — "dirty, anyway" — was bagged full of them.

"Making you to feesh?" asked a newcomer to mill, who, after unloading his grist on the mill porch, and after unhitching his horses in the shade of an oak a bit farther along the bank, was bringing them up for a drink at the well.

"Yes, sir."

"Me, too. Efen eef ve catch nothings, ve haf the fun, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say, wonder what's become of the man that got here first this morning?"

"Wonder where he went to. Haven't seen him around since we unloaded, have you?"

"Well, let's get our shoes and stockings off and start fishing."

"And roll up your pant-legs, fellows."

Soon the five were perched in a row on the river bank in the shadow of the great elm that leaned partly over the water, partly over the land, even shading one corner of the mill with its sweeping branches. Tiny and Reddy were squatted on the roots that straggled over the bank and into the water, like brown-gray knees laid bare by the washing of the current where the tailrace flowed down and swirled around them, wearing the soil away from under them at the edge of the bank.

"Some day this old tree's going to tumble," observed Reddy.

"Yes, when the roots that run up the

bank can't hold it up any longer. But that won't be today."

"Nor tomorrow."

"Nor next summer."

"All right, then, let's fish."

For some time they kept patiently at it, casting and then watching corks expectantly for telltale bobs. Every once in a while some wearied fisher would haul in his line to see if a lack of bait was the cause of the lack of bites. Now and then a water-soaked dewworm would be changed for a fresh, juicy one.

Still no luck, so they began wandering downstream, trying new waters. Tiny, however, stuck to his seat on the old elm — "like a puppy to a root," they jeered him. And presently he had his reward.

"Hi, looky!" they heard him shouting.

His cork was bobbing with a skip-and-a-jump, as some hidden creature

below kept it adance with dainty nibbles. Then all at once it went out of sight, and the line stretched tight from the tip of Tiny's fishing rod down into the water.

"He's hooked! You've got him! Hold on tight! That's the boy!"

The four came running, eager to see just how big a fellow Tiny had caught. Tiny pulled in most carefully, slipping his hands along the rod while pushing the extra length up the bank behind him, reeling in pole as well as line in his extreme caution.

"My, he must be a whopper!" exclaimed the boys, gathered in a group close about Tiny, but thoughtfully leaving him elbow room to play his catch.

For even when Tiny had the line in his hands, up near where it was fastened to the pole, the creature at the other end was like a dead weight.

"It's — caught — all — right!" gasped Tiny, biting his lower lip in excitement, as well as in the need for using extreme care in landing such an immense fellow as must be at the other end.

"Caught in the roots, isn't he?"

"Hi! "Be careful or you'll break your line!"

"Go slow or you'll lose him, sure!"

"That's the — Say, how you going to get him loose?"

"Now — he's — a-coming — up — a little!"

Very slowly the line did give under Tiny's firm but easy pulling.

"Funny! 'Tain't 'zactly caught in the roots, 'cause it comes — along — when I pull. But — it kind-a holds — back — on me — too!" grunted Tiny.

"Gracious! How much line you got, anyway?" exclaimed Windy, who had

had the bright idea of winding the line about the pole as Tiny hauled it in, to take up the slack in case the fish should suddenly decide to dart off.

"Not much — more — now! See, it's right — here — near this root!"

"But you can't see a thing, either," cried Jap, hovering over the edge of the bank to peer into the water, kept sudsy and whirling by the tailrace pouring into it from out of the wheel pit.

"Ought-a see — him — soon, now — 'cause the cork's up!"

And they did, too. And what a tartar Tiny had landed! For suddenly, not a foot away from them, an angry head came out of the water — a flat, snaky head with two bright eyes and a wide-opened mouth.

"A turtle! A snapper!" they whooped.

"You've caught him, for sure," they cheered the luckless Tiny, who for a

moment was so dazed and disappointed that he stared at the creature in blank amazement.

But he had him well hooked, for his line disappeared right down the turtle's throat.

"He's swallowed your bait and hook, both!"

"Only hook I got, too," mourned Tiny. "Hafto cut my line, I suppose."

"No, no, pull him in."

"Sure, pull him in. Mebbe we can get the hook out of him when he's once on dry land."

Tiny pulled slowly but steadily, then shook his head sadly.

"He's caught some way now. Anyway, he won't budge."

"Wish we could see into the water," complained Jap. "Mebbe his shell's got between a couple of roots, and he's stuck there."

"Mebbe he's hanging on to the bark with his claws."

"Lemme try him once."

"Say, I know what to do." Tiny brightened with a new idea.

He took the fishpole and brought the tip close to the turtle's jaws. Snapping-turtle fashion, the animal made a lunge at it and held it fast.

"Now you have got him!"

"Now just wiggle him loose!"

"He'll hafto come now!"

Carefully Tiny pushed the pole this way and that, sliding the turtle with it as best he could, to free him in case his shell was wedged between the roots, as seemed likely.

"My, but he must be a big one! He sticks tight to those roots, anyway."

But at length Tiny got just the right angle on the careful shove he gave the snapper, and had him free.

"Take hold, everybody. Help pull him in!" shouted Windy.

"Get hold, everybody," they echoed, as so many members of a crew would respond with a loud and loyal "Ay, ay, Captain!"

Lined up along the length of the pole, the boys tugged and yelled, and perhaps it was the noise they made that had as much to do with getting that unwilling turtle out of the water as their combined weight on the rod.

"Here he comes!"

"Looky! What a whopper!"

"Look out for your toes, though!"

"A regular tartar, Tiny!"

The turtle put up a good fight for liberty, digging his feet into the bark and holding back with all his strength. And, as his shell was a good foot across, he had both the weight and the strength to make a stout resistance.

In time, though, the boys had him on the sand, at fishing-pole distance, exclaiming over him, wondering what to do with him. No one had had experience with a turtle of this size and fierceness, and, though they felt called upon to keep up the debate about him, they didn't know what to do with him now they had him landed.

But they were not left to deal with their captive alone. Their shouts had attracted the attention of the farmer who had been fishing considerably downstream. He now came hurrying up.

"Mine gracious!" he began, stuttering with excitement and with a none too familiar language. "Mine gracious! Ain't he a beeg vun? Ain't he a beeg vun? May be you sell heem, eh?"

"Why, I don't know," hesitated Tiny, wondering where there could be a market for a such a villainous-looking

creature. but ready to become a turtle dealer if such a market could be found.

"Eef you sell, I buy. Here, vait." The man dug into his pocket and brought up a piece of money which he held out to them. "Who ketch heem? I pay heem dis — vun tollar."

The four stepped back, looking first at the dollar, then at Tiny, then at the turtle. A dollar for that beast! My, wasn't Tiny the lucky boy, though! What could he not do with a whole dollar? So their shining eyes cried out, congratulating him, though they kept mum as turtles themselves.

To their astonishment, Tiny drew back the hand he had partly stretched out for the money, shaking his head.

"I'd rather sell it to you for — ten — dimes."

How their eyes popped at that. Ten dimes! Why, that made a dollar, just

the same. What was working in Tiny's noddle, anyway, to refuse a dollar but ask for ten dimes?"

"Ten times! Maybe I not got that many."

"Well, maybe the miller can help you out, and nickels will do, if you can't get it all in dimes," insisted Tiny.

"All right. I go see heem. Vait. Holt heem fast." And the man was off up the bank.

The boys all started quizzing Tiny, though not one mentioned the question uppermost in his mind — why the ten dimes?

"What do you suppose he wants that turtle for, anyway?"

"How you going to get him off'n your fishpole?"

"How old do you s'pose he is?"

"How much does he weigh, I wonder?"

"Say, wouldn't you hate to have him nab a toe, though, holding on the way he does to that pole?"

The boys stood around, hands pocketed — all except Tiny, who had a tight grip on the fishing rod. They pondered the snapper, the oblong brownish shell, the long snaky tail ornamented with a scaly ridge down the center, the thick, scaly legs, the long, thick, warty neck, the flat head, the short, pointed snout, the eyes so large and far forward. The animal crouched there on the sand, at bay and undaunted even though a captive, his jaws clenched on that rod, his whole air threatening fight.

Soon the farmer appeared around the corner of the mill porch and came stumbling down the steep bank toward them.

"Vell, you got heem steel? Fine! Here — here your ten times!"

"Thanks," nodded Tiny, with a calmness that made the boys gasp.

Then his eyes swept around the circle of his intimates.

"Hold out your hand, everybody. Everybody gets two dimes, Mister. We're buddies in this business, and all share the same."

"So?" laughed the farmer, and did as he was told, while the four stared with surprise, and grinned with delight, and blushed red with sheer pride and joy in their good friend Tiny.

Payment made, the farmer took possession of his purchase by stooping over the turtle and grasping it by the neck with both hands in one quick movement. A deft yank loosened the turtle's grip on the pole, then, a wrenching twist and he had wrung the animal's head right off its body, as one would wring a towel!

"You get your hook back, see?" he

said, as he tossed the head on the ground, from the neck end of which dangled Tiny's hook. "Baited, too, eet ees."

He then held up the body by the tail, hefting it in great admiration, almost smacking his lips over it.

"Ten, twelf, feefteen pound, maybe," he gloated, as he started off with it.

"Say!" called Tiny, voicing the general curiosity. "What you going to do with him, Mister?"

"'A-a-ah! I take heem to mine vife, home, and ve half soup of heem — fine soup!" Then the man did smack his lips, as if he already tasted the brew. "You see, ve — how you say? — shuck heem out from hees shell, ve skeen heem goot, boil heem long time, so he make soup — ah, such fine, very, very fine soup!"

"Soup! Wow!" murmured the five as they turned back to the problem still

left them — landing a real fish for their dinner.

"Wow! I wouldn't eat that thing for a dollar — not for two dollars!" exclaimed Jap, holding both hands over his shrinking stomach.

"Oh, some folks eat turtles."

"Yes, Grandfather used to live by the ocean, in New Jersey, and he says green-turtle soup is awfully good. But you wouldn't catch him eating any river turtles, he says."

"I don't guess many folks eat snappers, do they?"

"Never heard of it before — just sea turtles, in stories. Didn't Robinson Crusoe eat 'em, or their eggs, or somebody else eat 'em? I read somewhere about it."

"Guess so. Mebbe it was Swiss Family Robinson. They found so much truck to eat on their island, you know."

"I remember they did eat turtle's eggs; but it'd be sea turtle eggs."

"Well, mebbe snapper soup might taste all right then," reflected Windy, "but I'd rather be excused."

"Me, too,' they agreed to a man, jingling their dimes musically in cupped hands.

A "BULLY" DINNER

The five had returned to their fishing, each one anxious to be the first to land a catch — pickerel, perch, carp, anything so it be a wriggling, finny prize at the end of a hook, to gloat over with pride. For of course Tiny's tartar of a snapping turtle could not rightly be counted a finny prize, since it was not a fish and had been promptly disposed of.

"A nice fish for our dinner," they had planned the night before, when they had carefully included an old camp frying pan, matches, salt, pepper, and so on, among the numerous pieces of dunnage the day's festivities demanded. And they continued to relish the fish in advance now, as they wandered up and down the stream, impatiently casting to right and left, before and behind, or as they

perched on rocks or tree roots or river bank and held fishpoles over likely looking pools.

"Sh—sh! everyone!" Reddy warned the others from time to time, from a wet, slippery, tip-sided stone he had fancied might be quite surrounded with fish of all sorts. "Keep still, can't you? Fish never bite if you whoop and yell around all the time. They scare awfully easy."

"Huh! Nothing bites my hook even when I do keep still," Jap replied, and he gave the water a sharp slap with his line and ventured an inch farther into the stream, now perilously near the rolled-up edge of his trousers.

"They don't bite in the sun, that's certain!" And Windy changed from a pool where the sand grains at the bottom gleamed in the sunshine to the dark hole at the foot of the elm just about where Tiny's turtle had been lurking.

"They don't bite in the shade, that's certain!" Tiny jeered, and he moved out from under the elm tree to try his luck in the sunny spot Windy had just vacated.

"They don't bite at all — anyway, not this late in the day, when the sun is up and they can see your shadow," agreed Billy, casting rather dispiritedly from where he stood in a shallow place about midstream several rods below the roaring milldam.

"Early morning is the best time to fish. We should-a been fishing just about the time we were leaving the farmer's."

"And miss the flapjacks and sirup!"

"No. Only Billy's right; if the fish don't see your shadow they bite better."

"Sh — sh! I tell you, you'll scare 'em all away, keeping up such a jabbering," growled Reddy.

In disgust he started wading downstream, away from the noisy group that just would talk, whether the fish liked it or not. The current caught his cork and started off with it; he followed its floating course, as in a sort of idle game, letting it lead him.

He had gone quite some distance when all at once it stopped moving. Some weight on the hook pulled it partly under the surface, so that the water rippled around and over it in curling little eddies, just as about a stone that peeps above the riffles.

"Hi, fellows, looky! I've caught one! Looky!" He yelled his triumph the instant he realized that something was troubling his cork.

"Hold him! Hold him!" yelled the four.

And, mistaking Reddy's announcement of triumph as a call for help, they

tossed their own poles on the sand and came plunging down the river toward him.

"Say! Quit it! Don't you be a-scaring my pick'rel off before — there, what did I tell you!"

For, excited with the fear of losing his catch, or with concern that the boys would interfere with his drawing up his own shining prize, Reddy gave the line a quick jerk. Immediately it came away. But when the dangling end of his line appeared in the air it was quite empty. Even his hook was gone! There was nothing below the cork but a yard or so of wet, dripping line.

"Gone!" he wailed.

"Hook, bait, and sinker gone!" groaned Windy.

"Tough luck, Reddy. Not even a turtle!"

"It must-a been a regular whale!"

"That's the—and not another hook among us, either!"

"I guess it was caught on a stone, or snag, or something down in the bottom of the river," grieved Reddy.

"Oh, well, not much chance of catching anything, anyway!"

They consoled Reddy a bit longer, there being nothing else they could do for him. The spare hooks they brought from home had been packed into the can of bait for safe-keeping, and that had been lost long hours ago. So, after a time, the four returned to their own poles, each continuing his fishing exertions in whatsoever place seemed the most likely spot.

Reddy felt very downcast. He had set his heart on catching a fish, and now nothing else seemed interesting. If only he had been more careful! No use at all to jerk the line as he did. All for

lack of a little forethought, in his excitement he had spoiled his whole day.

So he gloomed, as he waded slowly back upstream toward the boys. Then, through the clear water, he discovered the slightly winding little furrow in the sandy river bed made by a clam on a jaunt. He followed it, and a yard or so farther on came up with the traveler, a big fellow with white foot protruding from the two halves of his shell. With some of his old-time zest, Reddy lifted it dripping from the water and studied it, admiring the deft ease with which it slid into its house and closed the door firmly after it, as if to announce, "No Admittance."

"What a great piece of bait, if I only had a hook," he thought.

Then a grin spread over his face, so glum such a short time before. Why bother with a hook? If a fish would

swallow a hook, why not a piece of bait without a hook? Worth trying, anyway.

So, with his knife, he pried the clam from its shell. He tied his fishline tightly about the creature's middle, so that it looked like a little bundle of white meat. With this tempting bit dangling below the cork, he kept on down the river.

Soon he came to a place where he could wade across to the opposite bank without getting wet much above his hips.

"Just so I don't get my clean waist wet, it's all right. My pants, they'll dry before night," he assured himself, and went on though the surge of the current, and the lift of the water, kept him reared breathlessly up on tiptoe.

Once on the opposite bank, he found a seat under a tree. He settled himself there, then let his line sag out of sight in

a deep, shady pool where the bank had been sheared away around the foot of the tree. He didn't call to the boys, for it would mean they'd all chase pell-mell after him, and go scaring all the fish away faster than he could coax them into the pool with his clam.

For some little time he half sat, half lay there under the tree, taking care to keep back so that he wouldn't be seen from the pool. As he faced the sun, there was no danger of his casting a frightening shadow over the water. Of course, he had to guess what was going on about his line by the feeling, and such a long time passed without any other pull than the gentle tug of the current that the drone of the mill and the *sh-sh-sh* of falling waters, the warm sunshine, and his utter ease, all combined to lull him off to sleep.

Just as he was nodding, there was a

sudden pull on his line that brought him wide awake. Then a weight and a sort of telegraphic twitching all through line, pole, and even the length of his arms that said as plainly as words: "You've caught your fish all right, unless I can get away before you can land me."

But Reddy had learned one lesson: "Never brag of your fish until you've got him." So this time, instead of shouting a wild announcement to the boys, he shut his lips grimly, and put all his wits into the task of landing whatever had swallowed his bait.

"My, it must be a whopper!" he did permit himself to whisper as he clenched his teeth and pulled as gently as possible on the line.

Peering over the bank, he could see that his cork was quite out of sight, while that wordless message kept coming up line and pole from the struggling

captive below: "You've got me, all right!"

"Hi, looky! See where Reddy's got!"

"Yes, and what's he doing?"

"Yes, what is he doing, trying to fish without a hook?"

"But he's got the best place of all. Where he is, he doesn't make a shadow on the water at all!"

"Why didn't us geeses think of it before? Let's all go over on that side?"

"Come on, let's!"

And on they came, as fast as they could wade across, squealing as the water got deeper, stopping to roll up their trouser legs, or stooping to pull them up without stopping. But Windy in the lead hadn't reached the bank when, to their surprise and Reddy's great delight, his hand-over-hand reeling in of pole and line brought the fish out of water. To be sure, it was not a

finny prize, nor did it gleam diamond-like in the sunshine, but it was nevertheless a fish.

It was a bullhead, a member of that heavy, stupid, sluggish, ugly, scaleless, barbed catfish tribe that haunts muddy pools and sluggish places, that will swallow almost anything and never fight much for escape, rather seeming to plead for a place on the table. But it was a fish, and an edible one, and the first one caught by the Gang, so Reddy was all agrin as he dangled it before four pairs of admiring, astounded eyes.

"Caught it without a hook, too!" he triumphed. "Just tied a clam on the end of my line, and the fish did the rest!"

"Well, you are some fisherman!"

"I'll say you are, to catch a fish without a hook!"

"How did it stay on, though, without a hook?"

"Oh, its mouth is little, and the bait big, and once it got its teeth in the tough clam, it was good and caught."

"Look out for its pickers; they hurt like needles if they stick you."

"Say, let's all go to fishing without hooks!"

"No, let's eat!"

"That's the — er, time to eat, I say!"

"I say it, too — *time to eat!*"

"'Course, it's only a bullhead," Reddy began apologetically.

"What of it? Folks eat bullheads."

"Sure they do — when they can't get any better fish."

"It'll make a bully dinner!"

"Bully is right!"

What a busy crowd they became! Back across the stream to where they had left Old Dan and the plunder! Some gathered firewood. Some built a little fireplace out of stones on the sand.

Some fed and watered Old Dan. Some brought out the lunch baskets. Some cleaned the bullhead. Some ran to the mill for a handful of flour to roll the pieces in. Some scraped the butter off sandwiches for frying the fish.

Of course, all must take a hand at holding the pan over the flame, at sucking burned fingers, at trying the fish, turning it, salting and peppering it, rolling more pieces in flour, building up more fire, frying more pieces. What fun it all was, those many little duties connected with getting that bullhead fried to a crisp, flaky doneness!

How eager they all were for a bite!

"My, isn't it done *yet?*"

"Say, you can't hurry fish, Mother says."

"'Course not. Hold your horses a while, till this fish gets good and done, can't you?"

"Nobody wants to eat raw fish, that's certain."

"No, but can't you cook it faster, get more fire up and make it sizzle louder?"

"It's sizzling loud enough. If you try to hurry fish, it burns on the outside before it's done inside."

"My, I'm about starved!"

"Me, too. Empty as a barrel with no bottom to it."

"Hungry nothing! Why, you had two breakfasts!"

"Say, I know a funny story about fish."

"Tell it, tell it! Mebbe it'll keep us from starving till that bullhead is done."

"Grandfather says when he was a little shaver they lived in a clearing in the woods, near a brook. His father used to go catch fish for breakfast, and they'd all be so hungry, their mother'd

make 'em — the kids, I mean — each stand in a corner of the log cabin, with a plate and some bread, and wait while she cooked the fish in the fireplace.

"When a little brook trout was done, she'd hold it out on a long-handled fork toward one of them, and that meant it was their fish. They'd come get it, and go back to their corner and eat it. The next fish would go to the kid in the next corner, and so on, till it got back to the first one again. That way, they couldn't quarrel about whose turn it was, 'cause their mother always remembered which one got the last fish, and they wouldn't change corners with each other, of course."

"Sa-ay! That story makes me all the hungrier for fish."

"Me, too. Isn't it done yet?"

"No, got to have more wood. Hustle, fellows!"

"I'm most too weak and hungry to hustle; let me tend the fish while you go get wood."

"Aw, you don't know how to fry fish."

"Sure, let him alone, he's doing a good enough job."

Finally it was cooked and ready to serve on the tin pans the boys had brought for that purpose; forks weren't necessary. And when the last piece had been eaten, and Reddy had told for the dozenth time or more just how he had succeeded in catching such a prize without "a sign of a hook — or ladder, either," one after another the boys lay back on the grass, loosened too-tight belts, and sighed a wheezy, breathless, almost-too-full-for-comfort but not-painfully-so chant of

"A bully dinner, I'll say!"

WINDY GETS WIND OF A FORTUNE

"Talking about clams," spoke up Billy, as the Gang lay on the sandy bank digesting their dinner of fish of their own frying and goodies from the generous basket Mrs. Munson had furnished, listening to the drowsy roar of the mill-dam and the drowsier hum of the mill, and chattering over events recent, long past, or still to come.

"Who's talking about clams, I'd like to know?"

"Reddy Maynard, using one for bait and catching a fish with it, too."

"Sure he's talking about them. Why, when we're old fellows with long chin whiskers!" (Jap illustrated with a gesture a lengthy flowing beard from jaws to belt), "and we meet Reddy —"

"Grandfather Albert Frederick Maynard," interrupted Windy.

"He'll begin, 'Remember, boys, the time I caught that bullhead without a hook, with a big clam for bait?' "

"Sure he will!"

" 'Course I will. I'm never going to forget that," grinned Reddy.

"Yes, but talking about clams," insisted Billy, "lots of folks gather them for the pearls in them."

"Pearls?"

"Sure, to put in jewelry, like diamonds, only milky white 'stead of glassy bright, and — oh, I made a rime."

"Too late to wish on it now, though, 'cause you kept on talking before you stopped to wish."

"Yep, can't wish on a rime if you say a single word afterward."

"Going on talking queers your luck on the wish, sure pop!"

"What about pearls, though?"

"Oh, they're little round gobs of white. Mother's got one in a breastpin. They grow in clams, and oysters, and such animals, and are valuable when they're made right."

"Sure they're valuable — pearls of great price, the Bible calls them."

"Sure. Father read about a man finding one worth fifty dollars in a clam — a wild clam he caught in this very river, only lower down, beyond Cedar Falls."

"Ha-ha! Wild at getting caught, most likely."

"Ha-ha-ha! Wild to see der falls, mebbe."

"That's nothing. Uncle Ben knows a man that found a pearl worth over a hundred dollars, pretty near two hundred, and in a river clam, too."

"How do they get into the clams, though?"

"Oh, they aren't in all clams — just the ones that get hurt, or something — sand, maybe, gets into their bodies and they can't get it out —"

"Would think they could shake it out — stand up on their one foot and flap their shells."

"Quit your kidding, silly! When a grain of sand gets up in their shell and they can't get it out, they make the pearl around it, out of the same stuff they make their shells of, only nicer, like the pinky inside."

"I should think every clam could have a pearl, then; there's plenty of sand."

"Don't, though. You could hunt clams all day, or a month, or a year, mebbe, and not find a single pearl. Then mebbe the next one would have a pearl in it."

"Say! Looky! A cornelia!" Windy

held up the pebble, of a pretty red color, rather pitted on the rounded surface.

"Where's the streaks? Show us the streaks!" demanded the four, crowding around him.

Windy licked the stone, the preliminary test for the true carnelian.

"There now, and there," he proudly pointed out, but when the others hesitated to accept it as a real carnelian, he cracked it between two stones.

"Now look!" he triumphed, for the split side showed white wavy lines running round and round a central spot of ruby red.

"She's a beauty, and no mistake!"

"Let's look for cornelias!"

"That's the—must be thick around here!"

"Who can find the most?"

"I've already got two."

"Who can find the biggest one?"

And the carnelian hunt was on. The boys started off along the gravelly bank, at a crouching gait, all eyes alert for similar pebbles. Every stone that was chosen as a carnelian must first of all be licked to show a wet surface, and if no white streaks appeared it had to be tossed away. Indeed, many a tongue-swipe was wasted on mere pebbles of a greasy red or a milky gray.

Before long, however, Jap had three, two reds and a cream-colored one. Billy had four, all red, one beautifully marked with a cluster of glassy white grains. Windy had a pale-rose one and a smoky-white one to add to his original two, and Reddy and Tiny each had several apiece to chink in their pockets, though one of Tiny's collection was pronounced a real "cornelia" by only one-fifth of the Gang — which fifth may be guessed.

In this way they wandered downstream, around a bend in the river and into new territory. Suddenly, nosing along on the watch for pebbles, Windy, in the lead, commenced sniffing.

"Whew! What's that?"

"Something dead, all right! Wow!"

"That's the—" came Billy's clipped-short remark, muffled because of a thumb and finger closed tightly around his stubby nose.

"Sniff, sniff!" went Windy, too curious to object seriously to the strong odor of decay that now filled the air. The other four, however, putting comfort before curiosity, held their noses firmly nipped shut and searched only with their eyes.

But this was a mystery best solved by the nose, so it happened that Windy was the first to locate the source of the stench. It was a pile of clams — a

bushel, he declared, though perhaps his hat would have held them all. They were spread on the dry sand at the end of a log whose main bulk ran out into the river. Some of the shells were wide open and empty; others were open but with the dead mollusks still inside.

"Wow! Talk about pearls!" cried the four, and edged away, after one noseful of the putrid scent.

But Windy, like the true scientist, did not let his nose rank above his brains. He caught up a stick and began poking at the scattered heap.

"Wonder what they're doing here? How did they get here? Why are some empty and others not? And here's a fresh one. See, it's tight shut and a little wet yet, though on top of some dry ones. Something must bring them here, then. They wouldn't crawl up here to die.

Then his exploring eye noticed another peculiarity. He caught up one of the empty half-shells.

"Looky! This one's been gnawed at the back!"

He squatted beside the collection, poking about for the mate to this half-shell. When he found it, he fitted the two together, and it was plain to see they had been gnawed apart along the hinge at the back, by strong, sharp teeth.

"Like a squirrel works on a nutshell," he added, still wondering about the mystery. "What eats 'em, do you s'pose? Has to be something that can dive to get them, swim with them here, then gnaw them open."

The four now ventured nearer, and began to voice their opinions, freely spoken, for all they were so muffled in enunciation.

"It wouldn't be a squirrel; it wouldn't dive."

"A duck could dive, but it couldn't gnaw."

"Turtle, mebbe."

"I know. It's a muskrat's work. Father was reading the other night to me out of a liberry book, and it said muskrats eat clams; but it didn't say anything about piling shells up this way."

"There's muskrats in this river. The Indians used to come up from Tama Reservation every spring to hunt them, my father says."

Windy, in the meantime, had become conscious of a small pebble caught between his toes. He lifted up his bare foot to pick the stone out, hopping up and down on the other foot to keep his balance. A little decayed clam-meat was sticking to the pebble, showing plainly how it had got pressed between

his toes while he was stepping around in the mess of shells and flesh. When Windy got a look at the pebble, he held it up, eyeing it wonderingly.

"Say, here's a funny cornelia, if it is one. Got caught between my little and the next toe just now."

"Naw, it's too white for a cornelia."

"Well, show us the streaks in it if it's a cornelia."

"Too round, too."

"Wait till I wash it off; it's got clam meat—"

"Say, Windy, give us a look once. It looks like the pearl in Mother's breast-pin." One look and Billy nodded energetically. "Yes-sir-ee! It's a pearl, sure pop!"

"A pearl!" Windy stared at the pinky-white bead. "Say, what do you know about that? Stepped right into a fortune, didn't I?"

"If it's worth fifty dollars, you certainly did!"

"Or mebbe a hundred!"

"Wow! That would be a fortune — make you pretty nearly a millionaire."

"No, only a hundredaire. Takes lots of hundreds to make a million."

"Anyway, I'd feel like a millionaire with a hundred dollars."

"I don't guess it's worth even fifty, but mebbe it is. It's about the size of the one in Mother's breastpin, and the whole pin only cost twenty dollars."

"Well, if it's worth only twenty dollars, or ten, or even only one, it's worth all it cost me to find it."

"Mebbe there are some more around here."

With Tiny's suggestion the five set to work, poking about in the group of shells and decaying flesh, all dislike for the smelly place quite lost in the desire

for pearls, of great price or of any value whatsoever.

But the muskrat's garbage pile had no more such treasures for them; at least, their careful search did not result in any other reward than the pleasure of having searched it thoroughly.

"Guess you got them all, Windy," they admitted, when they were sure no more precious jewels were buried in the stale mess.

"Tell you what, I'll ask Mr. Grannis if it's worth anything," Windy said as they rambled along back up the shore toward the distantly humming mill.

"Sure, he probably sees lots of them."

The miller, however, had not seen very many river pearls. He did pronounce Windy's find to be a pearl, all right, but how valuable he couldn't say, not being experienced in such matters. It was his opinion that it was not worth

any great amount of money, not being overly clear.

"Pearls the same size may not be worth the same money; sometimes a small one is worth more than a larger one, though of course the highest priced ones are large as well as clear and shining. How'd you run across this, by the way?"

When the boys, all five talking at once, but Windy always in the lead, told him about the pile of shells, he nodded, smiling.

"You ran across a muskrat's 'oyster restaurant,' as I call one of their feeding places. Muskrats are so fond of clams they take considerable pains to fish for them. Many a time along the river here I've seen a muskrat swim out a way, dive, and come up with a clam in his jaws. Occasionally, if real hungry for clam, a muskrat will stop on the

first stone or log or sand bar he comes to, to eat his catch. Sitting up on his haunches and holding the clam in his paws, he will gnaw the shell apart and take out the meat, just as a squirrel eats a nut.

"But, as a rule, a certain rat will have a certain stone or log, usually on the bank, where he carries his clams — his oyster or clam restaurant. If he is hungry he will eat it right away, but if not will often leave it on the sand to ripen."

"Ripen!"

"Well, rot, then. You see, up on the sand and in the sun, the clam soon dies for lack of water; when it is dead, the shell opens up as the body loses its grip on the two parts. I've seen a muskrat spend all the forenoon gathering clams, piling them up on the sand around a stone or log where the sun

would shine on them all day. Then the next day, or perhaps the day after, he'd come back and eat the meat out of all the opened shells. Then maybe he'd spend an hour or so replenishing his stock of clams — restocking his clam restaurant, so to speak."

"That's funny."

"Yes, there are many interesting pages in the book of nature, if one only has the time to read them, or maybe the right glasses," smiled the miller. "As for your pearl, bub, I advise you to take it to a jeweler and get it valued."

"Thank you, I will, sir," promised Windy.

But, sad to say, Windy was so over-careful with his treasure that he lost it before he even started home with it.

Hence, like Columbus, and Henry Hudson, and many another discoverer before him, Windy never learned the

real value or nature of the thing he happened upon.

Yet, like his famous fellow discoverers, he had the pleasure of making the discovery, which was considerable in itself, now wasn't it?

"Well, what next?"

The Gang, gathered on the mill platform, pondered new activities.

"'Tisn't time to eat again."

"Might go in swimming."

"No, let's leave that till afternoon; too soon after eating now."

"Aw, if we wait till we haven't had anything to eat, we'll never go."

"Tell you what, fellows," spoke up Reddy. "Let's go farther down the road and see what's there."

"Let's."

Down the dusty roadway they started, five barefooted boys whose toggery showed the wearage and even some tearage of the already long day. But straw hats and cloth caps of various shapes and colors bobbed happily along, now

in shade, now in sunshine, as a big arching oak on one side of the road gave way to a sprayey-branched elm farther along on the opposite side.

They had to stop at the flowing well for a drink or two apiece direct from the spout, then sauntered on. As they went past the shady, level space where Old Dan was parked, about halfway between the road and the river, the horse nickered a sociable "have a good time, boys," as plainly as words could say it.

Thereupon Jap, as befitted Old Dan's owner for the day, stopped to see that the horse was comfortable. He was, being unhitched, unharnessed, and tied to the back of the spring wagon with a rope long enough to let him browse or lie down, as he pleased.

"Old Dan the speed demon," cheered Tiny, giving this hero several friendly slaps on the curve of his neck.

And the others joined in a little tribute to the old fellow's powers as a racer, patting him fondly on nose, shoulders, and flanks, which was enjoyed by horse as well as boys, judging by the way the speed demon rubbed against them and nickered back answers to their praises.

Billy, as finder of the black leather bag, took a look to see that it was all right under the seat of the wagon.

"S'pose those two men will ever claim it?" he wondered.

"Mebbe. It's valuable, if it is just full of old papers."

"Tell you what," suggested Windy. "Might take 'em out now, and have a bonfire, and move into the bag ourselves; put our cornelias and my pearl, and things we find into it."

The boys looked at one another, their eyes asking, "Shall we? Or dassn't

we?" Then Tiny voiced the general dislike of "meddling."

"Better not, Windy. They might claim it yet, and the *re*-ward might be bigger if we left things alone."

"That's the — 'course it would."

"Sure. What's inside must have some value to those that put them there, else they wouldn't have had them along."

"That's so, too."

"Uncle Ben'd be awful mad if any one meddled with his stuff."

"Or anybody else."

"Your pearl's safe enough in your pocket, Windy," they jibed.

"Say, where d'you suppose that man's gone that got here first? Here's his team, but we haven't had a sight of him for a long time."

"Should think his horses'd need watering."

"They do. Hear 'em nicker."

"Let's water 'em, then."

"No, they might run away if we got them untied from the wagon."

"Where's the turtle man? He could water 'em."

"Over on the other side of the river. That's where I saw him last, fishing up above the dam."

"Here's his turtle in his wagon," said Reddy, taking a sly peep. "Tail still wiggling. Takes him as long as a snake to die, doesn't it?"

"Sure, a turtle and a snake are relations; they're both rep-*tiles*."

"Sure they are."

"Think of eating a snake!"

"Huh! lots of folks do — Indians and Hottentots and such wild people. My father was reading the other night about a white man, a 'splorer, that ate some cooked snake, over in Africa, with the Hottentots. He said it tasted all right

to him — the 'splorer — just like young pig meat."

"My grandfather knows a man that went to an Indian's camp, and they were eating snakes. They offered the man some — said it was good — but the man didn't try it."

"Uncle Ben knows a fellow that got lost in the woods and had to eat — what do you s'pose?"

"Snake?"

"No, porcupine — ha-ha!"

"Quills and all?"

"No, he peeled it, but he said it was awfully tough and strong and greasy, 'cause porcupines eat pine bark and needles and such stuff, and it makes them fat, but strong."

"Say, I know. Let's water these horses with Old Dan's pail."

"Good idea! Let's!"

"That's the — er, sure we can."

So, before continuing on their way, the boys carried water to the team and were glad to see them sip it down, nearly a pailful apiece.

"Should n't ought to go off and leave them so long without water," they assured one another.

Off they started once more, and kept on for a quarter of a mile perhaps, so far, anyway, that the trees hid the mill and unless they kept very still they could no longer hear its busy hum or even the thud of water falling over the milldam.

Finally the zigzag road crossed a very small bridge before starting up a rather steep hill, to turn at the top right in front of a farmer's gate and ramble on in another direction, away from the river, through open, sunny country laid out in farmland patches. Now the bridge was built across a shallow ravine,

down which trickled a small flow of water.

"Where do you suppose that water comes from?" asked Tiny as the five paused on the shady bridge to look up the wooded ravine. "Everything else seems so dry, with no rain for days."

"Another flowing well, like the one at the mill, mebbe."

"Tell you what, let's go up the gulch instead of the road any farther."

Reddy's proposition met with general favor, for, while the road stretched across country hot and dusty and unshaded, the little gully looked cool and inviting, with trees up either side and that trickle of water like a silvery ribbon to mark its deepest part.

There was a ditch, and a "bob-wire" fence to go over and under, with a patch of twinkling blue-blossomed plants to make the place gay — little low plants

with long, grasslike leaves in pairs, the topmost couple of leaves offering a cozy snuggery for the clump of three-cornered blue flowers and drooping pinky-blue buds that filled the green "dish" like a small bouquet in a large vase.

"Snake's-eyes!" they cried, and fell to gathering the pretty stalks.

"Are a snake's eyes blue?" queried Billy.

"Don't know. Mebbe they're called snake's-eyes 'cause the juice is so slippery."

"But a snake isn't slimy; it's dry when you pick it up out of the grass."

"That's so, only folks that name flowers can't be too choosey."

"Say, what do I hear? Listen!"

"Pe-wee, pe-wee, peer!" came floating down from the trees, though whether near or far away the boys couldn't say.

"A pewee bird!"

"My, it sounds lonesome!"

"Or sleepy!"

"Pe-wee, pe-wee, pe-e-e-r!" repeated the little bird invitingly.

The boys at once accepted its invitation, and began peering everywhere for the feathered mite. They found it at last, too, though it didn't do one thing to help them locate it — a little leaf-colored bird with sunny breast perched very quietly on a branch near the tree trunk, and making its wisp of a voice come from far away even though it was quite close overhead.

"Wood pewee, it is," murmured Tiny.

"S'pose there's a nest anywhere around?"

" 'Course, but be sure he won't give it away, where it is."

Such a gentle-voiced, soft-eyed, quiet-mannered bird made them feel almost like tiptoeing away from the place, and

they did go quietly for a few paces. But soon other things claimed their attention, chiefly the wonder as to what lay ahead up the gully, around the bend. So presently they were splashing through the trickle of water, all noise once more — and so all boy, I suppose?

So quickly did the fragile petals of the snake's-eyes wither that some had tossed away their clusters of stalks almost before they were out of sight of the bridge. Then those who still kept their scanty bouquets clutched tightly in hot, moist hands threw them away, absent-mindedly forgetting all about them when Reddy, in the lead, rounded the turn in the ravine and called out in that tone of renewed interest in things: "Looky! A spring! A spout spring! Comes right out of the hill!"

"Hurray!" they yelled, and all started on a lively sprint toward it, as if this

pleasantly exciting novelty would surely escape them if they didn't make haste.

Out from the side hill it issued, beneath a rock. The owner of the land had made a spout of two boards nailed together V-wise, to catch the stream and carry it into a drinking-trough for cattle. One cow was even then drinking at this refreshing "soda-fountain" or "lemonade-stand" of nature's and man's contriving; other cattle were lying in the shade near by, lazily chewing their cuds.

As the five came rushing up the ravine, Bossy took her dripping muzzle out of the trough and waddled off, as much as to say, "Help yourselves, boys, the water's fine!"

Some of them followed the old cow's example and drank from the trough. But Reddy, going around behind the low box to drink from the spout, gave a yell of discovery.

"Hi, see what I found!"

Full of wonder, the four joined him, to peer down into the moist little hollow behind the tank.

It was shaded by the overhanging rock and by the box, and so was kept damp with the trickling drops that oozed out along the bottom of the spout. It was rimmed with grass and bedded with fine sand, and altogether was as nice a nest as could be desired. And there, enjoying the cool, moist, shaded basin, were six tiny turtles, huddled together in a little group.

"Snappers, too," decided the boys, for the reptiles were no sooner disturbed than, small as they were, they whirled about to face the boys, with wide-opened mouths.

"Say, what they doing up here, anyway?"

"They want peace and quiet, mebbe."

"Well, they've got it. Couldn't find a better place for it than this."

"S'pose the farmer'd buy these, too?" exclaimed Reddy.

"One isn't big enough to make much 'soup of heem,' but mebbe the whole six would be enough."

"Tell you what, let's take 'em down to the mill and offer 'em to him."

"No, let's give 'em a chance for their lives. Why, they ain't hardly lived any yet."

"I know — let's take 'em home with us, and raise 'em. Then, when they get big as the one Tiny caught, we can sell 'em," proposed Reddy.

"If we can find anybody to buy 'em."

"How we going to catch 'em, though, and carry 'em, too?"

Windy giggled.

"Each of us can let a turtle nab a finger, and carry them that way. Reddy

can carry two, one on each thumb, all the way back to Mayville."

"Or one on each of his big toes."

"Aw!" scoffed Reddy.

For, tiny as the turtles were, there was something warning about the way they crouched there facing the boys, six in a row, and all open-mouthed, as if daring their big enemies to come any closer with their bare toes.

But Reddy, his mind set on starting a turtle ranch in a tub in his back yard, thought of another scheme. He broke a stout twig off a near-by plum tree and thrust the end toward a little snapper. The turtle made good its name by catching it with a quick, determined set of his small jaws.

"Aha!" triumphed Reddy. "Get you a stick, everybody, and a turtle."

So it happened that a procession of five boys and six turtles wended its way

up the ravine and along the road back to the mill, tramp-fashion. That is, each boy had a twig over his shoulder, to the end of which clung a little snapper, like a handkerchief bag on the end of a staff. Reddy, the chief owner of the new ranch-to-be, had two turtles, one over each shoulder.

"And say, I'll mark every one on the shell with a *R. M.*, and then if they get away they'll be branded, and everybody'll know they belong to me, and I can get 'em back again."

"That'll be a good scheme," they nodded.

" 'Course it will. My father read about a man that used to see a turtle every year, the same one in about the same place, with a *W.E.B.* on his shell — a big old fellow he was, about a hundred years old."

"A hundred years!"

"Do turtles get to be that old?"

"Say, that'll make them live longer than I will."

"Oh, mebbe not. When you get whiskers down to your belt, you'll easy be a hundred years."

"Lots of folks live more than that."

" 'Course they do."

"Grandfather read of a man that was a hundred and thirty-one."

"My grandfather knew an old Indian so old his face was all shriveled up like a potato. He's got his picture, and he looks like a withered-up turnip with shoebuttons for eyes."

"Turtles live older than a hundred, too."

"Say, Uncle Ben knows about a man that found a turtle with a *C. C. 1492* on its back."

"C. C. 1492! Why, that's Christopher Columbus!"

"Say, that'd make the turtle old as America."

"Fourteen from nineteen — five. He'd be over four hundred years old, that turtle."

"But the turtle was only about fifty years old."

"Some one else had marked him."

"Sure, that's the joke."

There was considerable debate as to what to do with Reddy's live stock. Some were for putting them in the bag, but it was decided that the owner, if he ever claimed it, wouldn't like to have the six little turtles, "clean as can be, though," walking over and among his papers.

"Let's ask the miller if we ought to put them in water or not to get them home all right."

So the boys trailed up to the mill doorway for advice.

"You see, if we feed 'em good, they'll be worth six dollars by fall," gloated Reddy the turtle-rancher. "And we'll keep all their little ones, too, and sell them for a dollar apiece when they get big enough."

"If you've the patience to wait that long," said the miller, with twinkling eyes. "You see, it takes a long time for turtles to grow up. One of these tiny things won't be laying eggs for years, yet. A turtle is one of the slowest growing animals known — slower even than the elephant, and that animal must be about thirty years old before it can produce young."

Reddy scratched his head, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess they'll be too much bother to take them home, then. Tell you what, let's mark 'em on the shell, though, then take 'em back where we

found 'em. Here, every one of you can have your own, to put 'nitials on. Then, whenever we come here and see one of these turtles, we'll know it. It won't hurt to cut their shells, will it, Mr. Grannis?"

"No, the shell is nothing but hornlike material. I'll put your initials on for you, if you like."

With occasional stops to "go look after things," and with always an ear on the humming machinery, the miller spent some time at the task. He drew his chair out on the porch, the one he always kept near the doorway. It was one he had made out of a barrel by cutting some of the staves through around the middle of the cask, leaving others for the back; it had a sack nailed across for a seat, and a bag of bran for a cushion, and was indeed as good a chair as any, as far as comfort was concerned.

The boys thought it a very wonderful invention; surely it was a clever and unique one.

Holding first one little snapper and then another on his knee, he deftly cut a *R. M.*, or a *W. H.*, or a *J. M.*, or a *B. B.*, or a *T. L.*, or another *R. M.*, in the soft but unfeeling shells. The little snappers never moved once. Holding tightly to the things they had thought were going to hurt them, they seemed to have no fear that anything else could hurt them. There isn't such a large amount of brains in a turtle's skull, you know.

When each was marked, with sticks over shoulders, or carried parasol-wise, or swung cane-fashion, the boys took the tiny reptiles back to the cosy place where they had found them.

"That's where they want to be most of all," they agreed, with that merciful

regard for the rights of dumb animals that no boy should ever overlook.

"Sure. It's as good a ranch as any," conceded Reddy, almost as glad to see the turtles back in their moist den as they were to be there.

"Now let's go away so they'll get over their scare and let loose of these sticks," suggested Jap.

"Let's!" agreed the others.

And with the word the Gang got under way, headed for new adventures.

"Let's go on farther up the gully," proposed Windy as the five turned away from the spring.

The wooded patch did promise entertainment, so they began their ramble with eyes on the lookout for whatever new thing might come to view.

First was that clump of wild plum trees, about and beyond the spring. But, though some of the fruit was pinkish on one side, all the plums were too unripe for even a boy's willing appetite. They shook the trees, and got quite a hailstorm of hard fruit in reply, but that was all the fun the grove offered them.

"Wow! No good!" exclaimed Windy, after trying his third bite at his third plum from the handful he had gathered with great hopes. Still he tried a fourth,

hoping against experience that the little red spot on one cheek would be more sweet than puckery.

"Wow!" it made him gasp, and he had to toss it aside, also.

"Don't keep tasting them," advised Jap, who after the first disappointing nibble had thrown away the few he had picked up.

Very slowly Windy decided to take that advice, examining each plum, however, before tossing it aside, to be certain it wasn't a bit redder and softer and riper than the others had been; disappointed because it never was.

However, he was soon comforted by the discovery of a new tidbit, a wild sarsaparilla plant, with its long-stemmed single leaf of many bronze-green leaflets held parasol-like over its flower stalk, which also sprang from the ground close beside the leafstalk, but

was topped with three balls of fluffy whitish blossoms.

"Hey, wild sars'paril'!" he cried, and, dropping on his knees beside the pretty plant, he started digging at the root with his much-nicked knife blade.

"Wild sars'paril'!" echoed the others, and they too commenced work at the base of the two stalks.

Soon the Gang was dragging from the earth a long, rope-like root, which, instead of coming to an early end, kept tearing back more and more of the loose soil that covered it.

"My, it's a big one!" they rejoiced, and they continued to pull with might and main until suddenly it gave way, tumbling them over in all directions.

"Ha-ha-ha!" they roared, for on this wonderful day almost every experience that came their way was great sport.

Soon each had a foot or more of the

root, scraped down far enough to permit a good bite to be nipped off; then they went on their way, chewing at the tasty, spicy cut, while scraping another stretch of root, to have it ready for a fresh chew when the first should lose its zest.

They found wild crab apples, and hazelnuts, both too green to be eaten; also wild grapevines, loaded with fruit, yet offering them nothing satisfactory in the way of refreshments. Windy nibbled samples of each, but had to give them up as valueless, at least in their present stage of growth.

"Say, you'll be sick if you don't stop eating everything you see," warned Jap.

"Aw! nothing ever made *me* sick," retorted Windy.

"Look out! Poison ivy!" cried Tiny, darting aside from the vine he had discovered; for he had once been poisoned by the weed, and now its glistening,

greasy, three-parted leaves and its clusters of whitish berries had no charms for him — only alarms.

"Say, Windy! There's something you dassn't tackle," chortled Reddy.

"No, nor nobody else," Windy dodged that dare.

They worked their way to the end of the little wood, where they stopped for a bit in the shade of some burr oaks to look out upon the clover field beyond, with butterflies fluttering over its purple surface like the spirits of the blossoms taking flight.

"Smell it!" they exclaimed, drinking deep of the rich perfume the wind wafted gently across to them.

Through the barbed-wire fence they snatched off blossom heads, to suck out the honey while wandering back along the way they had come.

They stopped for a drink at the

spring, and for a peep at the turtles, once more grown sensible, now off their switches and cuddled cozily together under the drip of the trough.

"Look, they got me in the middle," laughed Billy, by which he meant that the turtle labeled *B. B.* was in the center of the little group, with *T. L.*, *J. M.*, *W. H.*, and the two *R. M.'s* forming a ring about him.

On toward the bridge, past the wood pewee grove, now noisy with a vireo's incessant call of "See me! Look at me! See me!" though he flitted from twig to twig so rapidly, and was so like the color of a leaf himself, that it was much easier to hear than to see him.

They followed the gully under the little bridge, and the excursion was worth it, too, for where one mossy rock jutted out over another, in a built-up wall forming the approach to the bridge,

was the daintiest nest imaginable — the pretty cradle of the phoebe, or water pewee, or bridge pewee, as the bird is variously called.

On the outside the nest was overlaid with green moss; on the inside it was lined with horsehair; in it were four pure-white eggs, as delicate as though made of chalk dust and milk, just freckled with brown.

While the boys were peeping into it, as they could do by climbing up a couple of stones, step-like, the mother returned, to perch on a near-by ledge of rock and to "be-be-be" to them most pleadingly. There was nothing gay about her coat to win them, for she was a very plain brown-gray creature, with a buffy breast; but even if they had intended to harm her nest, which they did not, her coaxing chirps would have made them want to please her.

Soon they were on their way toward the river. Then, on the top of a little knoll just where the ravine ran down into the river, Windy discovered something really edible.

"Hey! Chokecherries!"

"Hurray! Choke-'ems!" rejoiced the four.

The fruit was in that most delightful stage of ripeness chokecherries can be, too — past the crimson, even the bright red hue, and into the ruby stage of color. That is when they have the acid tang that makes the chokecherry quite a different fruit from any other wild cherry, yet they have lost the extreme puckeriness that makes them almost unedible in the light red, or just-getting-ripe, season. Later, when they are almost black with ripeness, they are too tame, too mushy, too mealy, too tasteless. Ruby red, they are "just right."

The slender little trees were full of tantalizing bunches of the glowing fruit that shone in the sunshine like so many drops of jelly threaded on green stems.

"Gimme a boost, fellows," called Windy, making for the nearest tree. "I'll bend down the top, then you can all help yourselves."

"Only we must n't break it," worried Reddy.

"No, when I get up it I'll sneak out to where I can bend it over, then you can catch the branches and help."

Everyone boosted, and up went Windy, sampling the fruit as soon as he got up among the lowermost clusters. But Windy's weight, even out as far as he dared go, would n't bring the tree top within reach of their eager hands. So between bites Windy tossed down bunches to the others, and the delicious feast was on.

Eventually, however, each boy had to have a tree to himself; there was too long a wait between bites, this way. So, with boosts and hoists from the others, up they went. Tiny generously made himself the last one, for, being the longest-legged of them all, he said he could get up best without help. He made his tree, too, with a stump and a braced log for stair steps.

"My, choke-'ms the best fruit I know," muttered Windy, with his mouth full.

"Yes, only they make me feel so puckery in the throat," objected Billy meekly.

"Oh, I don't mind that."

"Me, neither. Why, they wouldn't be chokecherries if they didn't choke."

"My mother makes the best chokecherry jelly ever. Wish I had a pail. I'd take some home to her."

"Me, too. My Father says it's his favor*ite* pie."

"I like chokecherry pie all right, but my favor*ite's* apple pie, with ice cream."

"All over mud," giggled Tiny, his way of making a joke out of *a la mode,* as pie with ice cream is called.

"Wow! I'm getting so puckered I can hardly swallow."

"Not me! I don't mind the pucker a bit."

"It'll be lots worse, too, after you have a drink."

"Sure, water makes your mouth pucker something terrible."

"Say, I can scrape the pucker-stuff right off my tongue, thick as mud," discovered Billy, using a little twig for a scraper.

"Fellows! How many choke-'ems can you eat at once?" Windy challenged them.

"Ten!"

"Dozen!"

"Fifteen!"

"Two dozen!"

The challenge found plenty of contestants. Hastily bunches of ripe chokecherries were stripped of their fruit, the number of berries counted, and the whole palmful popped into a widely gaped mouth.

"I can hold a dozen, easily," announced Tiny.

"Oh, you got to eat them, chew them, pit them, and swallow the rest," Windy stipulated.

"Well, I can do all that with a dozen." Tiny had transferred the handful back to his palm to have room for speaking, then, putting them back again, he started chewing, pitting, and swallowing the whole dozen at once.

The number mounted up with each

fresh mouthful counted out. Windy safely disposed of twenty-one, Jap beat him by two, then Reddy raised the number by three, Billy announced twenty-seven, Tiny got thirty into his mouth by yawning wide.

"Thirty-two!" cried Windy; but he had to hold his hand over his mouth until he could get the cherries snugly tucked away in the corners of his cheeks before he could safely start chewing on them; as for pitting them, that was an exertion that made him red in the face and popeyed. He had to be very careful that nothing but a pit was going to slip out when he opened a narrow crack between his lips at one corner of his mouth.

Jap counted out thirty-three, but when he got them almost to his mouth he shook his head.

"No use. I could swallow them, pits

and all, mebbe, but I never could work all those pits around to the front of my mouth and get them out through my teeth."

"Can't swallow the pits, my mother says," warned Reddy. "Give you 'pendicitis."

Windy was chewing slowly away on his big mouthful, easing the strain by a pit or two every few seconds.

"Well, I'll try thirty-three. Mustn't let Windy win," cried Tiny, and in went that number.

Windy looked popeyed; but he began gathering another handful even while working on his thirty-two. So he no sooner had swallowed his pitted cherries to the last skin than he had another mouthful ready.

"Thirty-five," he announced, and even counted them again to make sure of the number. He had purposely made it two

more than Tiny's, to win the contest. He had trouble working them into his mouth, but did so with a little patience, and started in to make good his promises.

Tiny gathered thirty-six, then threw them all away.

"You win, Windy," he groaned.

"You win," conceded the others.

Windy grinned in triumph, as much as he could afford to let his mouth stretch in a grin under the circumstances.

But what a victory it was! For presently, having pitted and swallowed, or at least swallowed, the thirty-five, and returned to plain eating, say just one bunch of cherries at a time, he slipped down the little tree. He did it quietly, so as not to attract attention, but started off with his hands on his stomach, and humped over as in pain.

The boys heard him groaning softly to himself as he hobbled away.

"Say, you sick, Windy?" called Reddy.

"Sick? Why shouldn't he be?" taunted Jap.

"Looky, he's green around the gills," cried Tiny.

"Thirty-five," teased Billy, and he pretended to fill his mouth with cherries.

"Wow!" groaned Windy. "Don't — ever — say — choke-'ems — to me — again. Oh!"

He rubbed his waist between his necktie and his trousers belt with both hands, groaning hollowly and with his face twisted in misery. He crouched over, hugging himself with pain. He danced a little jig, in sorrow, not in joy. At last, he ran to a stump and threw himself over it, stomach down, heels wagging frantic distress signals.

"Say, he *is* sick, fellows!"

"Mebbe he swallowed some pits and he's getting the 'pendicitis."

"And he'll have to have an operation."

"And go to the hospital at Dow City."

"Say, we got to help him, quick."

The boys began shinning down their trees, to rally to the aid of their afflicted comrade.

"We'll hafto carry him to the wagon."

"And hitch up Old Dan, and —"

"And get him to the hospital, and —"

"And 'phone his folks, and —"

But hardly were they out of their trees, when good old Mother Nature, who is often much kinder to her children than they are to themselves, came to Windy's help, so that presently he had "unswallowed" his record-breaking mouthfuls of cherries much faster than they had gone down.

The boys were sympathetic until

Windy got to his feet, rubbing his eyes with his handkerchief. Then, the danger over, they had to tease him a bit.

"An ill Windy," laughed Jap, and the others joined in merrily.

"Thought nothing ever made you sick?"

"Say, can you swallow thirty-six and keep 'em down?"

"Bet you can't even do thirty-five again."

Windy, humped rather weakly on the stump, grinned wanly.

"Served me right for being a pig," he confessed.

"You sure were an ill Windy for a while, though."

"Wow, I sure was!" he agreed with a wry face, that made them all laugh.

"Well, I guess everybody's had enough chokecherries for one day," ventured Tiny.

"I'll say they have," chorused the four.

But, though they left the little grove of chokecherries behind as they strolled millward, they had not seen all of that fruit they were to see that day. For, as they neared the mill, the man who had been gone all morning was back, untying his horses to lead them to water.

"Hello!" he called. Then with a generous swing of his arm he motioned to two great tin pails full of fruit sitting on the ground near his wagon. "Want some chokecherries? Help yourselves if you do."

They could hardly keep from bursting out laughing at the look on Windy's face; they did let themselves titter softly, so the man wouldn't hear them.

"If you don't mind," spoke up Jap, with a mischievous grin at Windy, "we would like thirty-five."

"Thirty-five!" The man gave them a sharp look, and must have suspected some mischief in those four giggling boys and the one sober-faced, red-faced one. "What do you mean, thirty-five? Help yourselves, anyway. I got interested in picking them and have more than my wife will want to bother with."

"No, thanks, mister," said Tiny. "We've been eating some. We found a little grove of trees down the river, and got filled up on them."

"In that case there isn't room for seven more apiece, I suppose," nodded the man, starting for the well with his horses.

"No, sir," laughed the Gang, Windy loudest of all.

TINY TAKES A TUMBLE

"What time is it getting to be, anyway?" wondered Jap.

The boys were gathered in the road near the flowing well, doing nothing for the moment, strange to say. They had had some cool drinks to go with the cookies they had taken from the big lunch basket, and were ready for something else to do.

"Well, it's afternoon, anyway," guessed Windy.

"Mebbe so, but it's early yet," corrected Jap.

"Sure, lots of time to do things," put in Reddy.

"That's the — And lots more things to do," added Billy.

"Not more'n two o'clock, I'd say," hazarded Windy.

Four of the quintette were studying the sun, still riding high in the sky; two of them were spanning the distance to the horizon by handbreadths.

But Tiny had pulled his watch and chain carefully from his waist pocket. Being the only one in the crowd, it deserved careful handling, you see. It would keep good time, too, if it were only well shaken frequently, and as often reset. Tiny faithfully did this every time he remembered it, by guess when he had no better guide.

"Twelve-thirty by my watch and chain," he announced loudly.

"Huh, by the chain, then!" grunted Jap.

"Why, 'twas past twelve long ago by the mill clock!" objected Billy. "I looked in when Mr. Grannis was marking the turtles, one of Reddy's."

"Well," admitted Tiny, gently shaking

his valued if valueless timepiece, "I haven't set it for quite a while now. I'll go see what time it is."

"And keep shaking that tin lizzie after you do set it," came a friendly shot from the rear as he climbed the mill porch at the steepest corner rather than wait to go around to the steps.

When Tiny found the boys again, they were down below the mill, by the water's edge, hard at work at a game of skipping stones, which everyone can't do.

To play it successfully, one must first use great care in selecting the "skipper," which should be a flat, roundish, coin-like pebble, not too small to toss and with weight enough to cut through the air, yet not so large that its own weight interferes with its progress over the water. Next, it must be taken just so between thumb and finger, horizontally,

so its flat surface will strike the water. Then the arm must be swung back for good starting speed, and brought forward with a quick snap of the wrist, while the stone is set free with a spinning, not a tumbling, motion of its own. It must also be given a line of travel that will carry it far over water, yet very close to it. Now try it! It is quite an art, though, to give a stone such a start that it will keep bounding on and on in one skip after another.

Jap started the game, which his father had taught him. It didn't take long for the rest to learn it, until within a short time he had to look to his laurels, as the saying goes. Even Tiny, the last to get started at it, was soon making his "skippers" go whizzing low over the river, in bounding leaps, a light splash for each time it struck the water.

After all had learned to throw their

pebbles so they would bounce up from the water instead of sinking plump down, the contest settled into a trial of who could make a stone do the most skips. Four, five, six, even ten bounces before the "skippers" disappeared far out in the river, were tallied, four skips being common, ten uncommon.

Still the boys had n't played the stone-throwing game out.

"Who can send one clear across the river?" challenged Tiny.

The boys set to with a will. Before long it became necessary to establish the rule: "No fair getting your toes wet when you throw"; for, when wading out as far as rolled-up trouser legs would permit was allowed, long-legged Tiny had an advantage over the rest. Then, to win the coveted record, the boys began looking for dry spots that jutted out into the river.

Finally, after several rounds, when it came Tiny's turn to toss he giggled mischievously. For he had thought of a place no one else had tried — the roots of the elm where he had been standing when he caught his turtle. They made a sort of bracket over the water where they curved out and down, and there Tiny took his stand.

"No fair! No fair getting out there!" challenged Reddy.

"My feet aren't in the water," counter-challenged Tiny.

That was true, though his two big toes were within an inch of it as it swirled over the roots on its way from the boiling tailrace.

So finally it was agreed he could toss from there — that they'd all toss from there, to get an even start.

Tiny drew back his arm, crouched low to give his pebble all the speed

possible, and put every bit of strength he possessed into the fling.

The four others, on the bank close to the tree, each with a handful of choice pebbles he had gathered, to say nothing of all pockets full, watched with interest the progress of Tiny's "skipper." Merrily it bounded along, striking the water one, two, three, four, five times before it sank just short of the farther shore.

"Farthest yet!" they shouted, as much to be heard above the hum of the mill and the swish of the milldam, as because they were excited and would naturally shout.

"You win, so far!"

"Lemme skip from there, too!"

The boys turned to Tiny, three of them to congratulate him, Reddy to claim that vantage point for his turn.

"Why!"

"Where's Tiny?"

"In the river!"

"Tumbled in head first!"

"Looky! He's in the river, all but his heels!"

That was true, or nearly so. A pair of wildly kicking legs were thrust up from that shelf of roots where Tiny had been standing a moment before; the whereabouts of the rest of him could be guessed from their general position.

As one, his four pals tried and true sprang to his rescue. Windy and Jap both got hold of the waving leg nearest the mill race, and started pulling upstream; Reddy and Billy caught the other leg and began pulling downstream. But Tiny didn't come, didn't budge an inch, in spite of their wild jerks.

"Say, what's the matter?"

"He's caught!"

"Must be hanging on to the roots down under the water!"

"Then he'll drownd sure if we don't haul him out, and mighty quick."

"Looky, he *is* hanging on!"

Leaning over the water, now lit up by the rays of the afternoon sun, and so made partly transparent, the boys discovered that Tiny was in great danger. For by gripping tightly to the roots, as they could see he was doing, he could easily hold himself under, pull as hard as they might.

"Say, he'll drownd, sure."

"Get poles and pry him loose!"

"Run for the miller!"

"No time for that. Pull hard, everybody! Yank hard on his legs!"

"That's the — Pull! Everybody!"

"Make him come!"

He did come, all at once, to their surprise and relief, "from the roots," so to speak, in answer to their frantic tugs.

And then they nearly drowned him

for certain, for, two pulling one side of the tree trunk and two the other, they dragged him up as far as his legs could clasp the tree, where he stuck, on his stomach, his face still in the water.

"Leggo!" shouted Windy. "Leggo, you two! Throw his leg around the tree. Now! Pull, Jap!"

With a mighty heave, he and Jap had Tiny up so he still lay on the roots of the tree, the top of his head quite in the water but his nose high enough now to start breathing if he ever was going to. And as he began kicking and snorting they knew he was safe, though the four didn't stop their sturdy tugging until they had him on the sand in the sun below the elm.

Tiny sputtered, took a long breath, then another.

"Wipe out his eyes!"

"Roll him on a barrel!"

"What do you think? He's got his old watch in his hand!"

"Get the water out-a him! Roll him over!"

"His watch! How'd that get there?"

"Then he didn't tumble in a-tall!"

"He was holding his breath all the time, and reaching around for that old tin turnip!"

By this time Tiny was sitting up, snorting, wiping his eyes, and otherwise acting like a person half drowned.

"Say, what do you mean, scaring us that way?"

"And just for that old tin lizzie of yours?"

Tiny opened his eyes as wide as he could, and answered them glare for glare.

"Say, what you mean, yanking at me that way? You nearly pulled me out before I got hold of it."

"Then why didn't you tell us you was going to dive for that old piece of junk!"

"We thought sure you was drownding."

"We sure did, Tiny."

"Sure we did. We thought you were hanging on to those roots down under the water, and would drownd yourself, sure, before we could get you out."

Tiny looked at his dripping watch and chain mournfully.

"Guess it'll never run again," he wailed, when a good shake failed to set it ticking.

"All that scare for that old thing!"

"We thought 'course you'd tumbled in."

"Oh, I tumbled all right, if that'll satisfy you any," Tiny spoke up. "Went in head first, too. But while I was falling I felt my watch and chain slip out-a my waist pocket. Mother doesn't let

me fasten the chain in my waist button-holes 'cause it tears 'em out too much. So I took a good breath while I was tumbling, and went on after the watch."

"Goodness! I'm shaking yet, I got such a scare."

"Me, too."

"Why, we saw you hanging on to the roots."

"My father says a drownding person does hang on to things, that way, and hold themselves under, and —"

"They do, too. Uncle Ben saved a kid once that tumbled into a river, and, say —"

"My grandfather saved my mother when she was a baby. She walked off the porch right into the rain barrel, head first, and —"

"And the kid had his hands full of weeds, Uncle Ben said. He'd-a held himself under, too —"

"My mother didn't have any weeds to hang on to, but her toes caught on the edge of the rain barrel, and Grandfather saw them, and got her out just in time."

The kid 'ud-a drownded, sure, if Uncle Ben hadn't-a got there when he did."

"Well, 'twas better Tiny fooled us than if we'd-a thought he was fooling, and it'd-a turned out he wasn't."

"Sure, 'twas."

"And, from the way your heels were wagging, how was we to tell you wasn't drownding?"

"'Course we did. That's why we yanked on you so hard."

"Nearly split him in two, too, around the tree."

"That kid Uncle Ben saved was kicking his heels, too; that's the way he happened to see him. He would-a drownded, too, if Uncle Ben —"

"How was we to know you wasn't all in?"

"If Uncle Ben hadn't-a run quick and pulled him out, weeds and all. They had to roll him on a barrel to get the water out he'd swallowed, before they could get him to come to."

"My mother wasn't kicking; she was caught by the toes."

"Well, we can be thankful no one's hurt this time."

"Except the watch."

"The chain's all right, or will it rust?"

"My, but you must-a thought quick to get your watch before it could go to the bottom. The water's deep by this elm."

"They say a fellow does think quick under water."

"'Specially if he's about to lose a good watch and chain."

"Why, Uncle Ben said that kid he

saved thought it was the next day when he came to."

"How did you do it, again now, Tiny?"

"Why, I felt my watch and chain slip out, so I just held my breath, and opened my eyes, and hung on to the roots till I found them. The chain was caught on a root lower down. But you fellows nearly pulled me out too soon. I had to hang on tight to keep you from dragging me out before I could reach hold of the chain."

"Well, you're safe now."

"And your old tin lizzie of a watch!"

"Yes, mebbe I can tinker it up so it'll run good as before," nodded Tiny.

"Sure you can," giggled the four.

BILLY GETS BITTEN

"Say, fellows," spoke up Billy, while Tiny still mourned his water-soaked watch — to say nothing of the chain this time — and the remainder of the Gang stood or lolled on the sand doing absolutely nothing, and enjoying it, too, as boys can so easily do. "If we're going in swimming, it's time we're getting at it."

"I've been in," tittered Tiny.

"Sure, let's go now, while Tiny's clothes are drying."

"And his watch and chain."

"Whoop-ee! Come on, everybody!"

"Race you to the wagon!"

Up the bank they padded, making a game out of even this small bit of material, boy-fashion. As the five packages of bathing suits, or what served

for them, had been tied together, to make one bundle of them, there was a little delay at this point, since the knots had been tied so well it took several pairs of nails and sets of teeth to start them loose.

When the packages were get-at-able, the boys darted off into the bushes to change. Tiny spread his "real" clothes, which the boys jokingly called his "diving suit," on the bushes in the sun to dry, also his cherished watch and chain. Windy, as the possessor of a pearl of what he hoped would be a good price, wouldn't trust this valuable to his pockets, fearing it would get lost in all this taking off and putting on and tossing about of garments. So he popped it into his mouth for safe-keeping. At that, he wasn't the last one to get into the water.

For a time they splashed and paddled,

half wading, half floating, walking more than swimming, except Tiny, who really could swim, and Windy who said he could swim if the water wasn't too deep.

"Tell you what, let's go out on the milldam, down below, where the water doesn't cover the boards much," Jap suggested.

"Do we dare?"

"Sure, I've been out there before," announced Tiny.

"But you can swim, if you get washed off."

"No need to get washed off."

"Come on. I dare."

"Me, too."

There was a great willow that leaned a large branch out over the milldam, on the opposite or Mayvilleward bank, and from that it was easy to get down on the planking at the foot of the fall, which caught the water after its several

foot tumble, and which the miller called the milldam's "apron."

There they romped and raced and tagged one another, behind the curtain of falling water, in front of it, or in and out of it, the full length of the milldam. At one place, near the middle, the water came over in a broad, thick stream. There they could dodge behind the roaring curtain. At other places the top of the dam was higher, and the water either flowed around to a lower place or merely trickled over in slender, silvery ribbons.

"Say, kids—!" Windy stopped with a gurgle and a wild whoop, as he sprang to the rescue of his precious pearl.

For, when he opened his mouth, to call something not nearly so worth while as the pearl, but which must be whooped forth because it had popped into his mind, out leaped the pearl as though it had been awaiting this chance to escape.

Windy bewailed his loss, and even moped over it, for some time.

"If only I'd-a kept my mouth shut!"

"Which you might-a known you couldn't do, when you put your old pearl into it," was the only consolation this phase of his regret brought him.

Perhaps this loss was not the great misfortune it seemed. Perhaps, had the pearl proved to be of value, Windy would have spent the remainder of his life gathering and opening clamshells, in a search for more wealth of the same kind. He might have become a pearl miser, you see, instead of a useful man. This is all guesswork, of course, but there's no use crying over spilt milk, or lost pearls, or strayed dollars, or what might have been. What is and has been is always so much better for us, depend upon it, than any "supposes" or "maybes."

After the boys had romped about on the milldam apron, they decided to work down the river a way, on the side they had not yet explored, beyond where Reddy caught his bullhead.

So, still in their trunks, or whatever old clothes they were using for trunks, they started off, sometimes wading, sometimes swimming or pretending to swim, at times strolling along the bank.

One bend in the river, then another, and they discovered a bayou, or sort of shut-in bay, with a fringe of willows on a sand bar to cut it off from the river except at the upper end, where there was a gap for the water to flow in.

"Water lilies! Whoop-ee! Water lilies! White ones!" bugled Reddy, who at the time they rounded this bend was at the head of the procession.

There the blossoms floated like sail-boats the fairies had anchored in this

"Whoop-ee! Water lilies! White ones!" bugled Reddy

out-of-the-way place for safe-keeping until they should go for a moonlight sail down the river, or perhaps an aerial flight on white fog banks the country over.

The bayou was almost covered with their green pads and white blossoms, with reeds along the shore, also cat-tails and water grasses, and in the small open places between them the green film of scum that comes on stagnant pools during the long warm days of summer.

But the boys didn't care for that. They couldn't hurt their clothes, and could wash off afterward. And water lilies were treasures too inviting to pass by.

So through the soft muck and ooze they waded, out toward the blossoms, which always take good care to anchor themselves beyond the reach of most of their admirers. It didn't feel very good

to their feet, that slimy mud, not at all clean and firm like the sandy river bottom. Nor did they like the swish of clinging water weeds on their legs.

"I keep imagining I'm in a nest of snakes," complained Billy, with a finicky dislike puckering his chubby face.

"One thing against water lilies, they don't choose very nice places to live in," agreed Jap.

"But the lilies themselves don't get muddy or scummy, do they?" spoke up Tiny.

"How can they be so white, growing out of mud and slimy water this way?"

"'Cause their stems are so long, mebbe, they don't get near the mud."

"My sister knows an awfully pretty poem about water lilies, about how they stay so nice and white and smell so sweet, for all they grow out of mud. And the poem says that's the way with

folks; they can be good if they want to in spite of the evil things around them. She's learning it to speak at Sunday school next Sunday. Say, I'm going to take her some of these, then she can hold them while she speaks her piece."

"Let's all take some home. My mother likes them."

"Mine, too, and my sisters."

"All girls and women like them, don't they?"

"Sure they do. Uncle Ben says, whenever girls see water lilies, they always start squealing about them!"

"Ha-ha! They do, too."

"Mebbe it's 'cause they can't hardly ever get out where the lilies are."

"Won't they be glad when we bring home these bouquets?"

"Nice-smelling flowers, aren't they? Don't smell a bit like mud and slime."

"No, more like 'fumery."

"Hi! Looky what a big bouquet I'm getting."

"Me, too. My sister'll squeal when she sees this big bunch."

"I'm going to take some to my aunt. She's awfully good to me. She brought me a little custard every day when I had the tonsilitis last winter. 'Tasted awfully good, and I didn't have to chew or swallow it — just open my mouth for it and then let it slip down."

"Say, custards are good. I could eat pecks of them."

"Grandmother makes fine custards. I'll take her some water lilies, too."

"My grandmother likes all kinds of flowers. I'll take her some, too."

"Mine, too. She's kind-a like a water lily, I guess, with her white hair and pleasant face and always sweet-smelling little ruffles around her neck and on her sleeves."

"Let's give some to Mrs. Munson, for the lunch."

"Say, let's."

With big handfuls of the golden-hearted, white-fluted lilies, the boys waded out of the green, weedy water to shore, one after the other. Then they sat down on the grass, to braid the long, rubbery stems so they could carry their bouquets easier.

All at once Billy gave a loud gasp. What he had thought was a black lump of mud on his leg, and tried to brush off with his toe, clung tight. He used his heel to push it away, and still it refused to budge, though it looked soft and his foot was still wettish. He didn't want it to dry on, and, anyway, it had aroused his curiosity. It was such peculiar, rubberish mud, would move a little, even stretch a bit, when he touched it, but stay right there.

He reached over, wonderingly, determined to have it off. It did come off, after he took tight hold on it and pulled. Funny, but it was a bit like a worm, too, like a pulpy body. Then he noticed that it squirmed when he nipped it between thumb and finger. To his great horror, when he did get it off, blood began oozing from his leg at the very spot where it had been.

"Oh!" he yelled, springing to his feet.

Then he cried out again, for on the side of one calf was another one of those blackish lumps, and by his ankle another! And there were several more on his other leg!

"Help! Help! Something's biting me! Help! They're all over me, making me bleed!"

He was half-crazed with fear, dismay, horror, stamping and jumping like an Indian dancing a sort of war dance, with

wild whoops, motions, and everything complete except war bonnet and tomahawk. His eyes were big with fright; they almost covered his round face like a couple of blue china saucers.

"What is it? Skeeters?"

"Can't be snakes!"

"Ants! He's sitting on an ant hill, mebbe!"

"That's tough luck, in those clothes, Billy."

"Say, what's the matter with you, anyway?"

The boys had tossed aside their flowers to come to Billy's help, but when they saw what was frightening him nearly out of his wits, they had to laugh at him.

"Bloodsuckers! Nothing but bloodsuckers!"

"Bloodsuckers! All that fuss over just bloodsuckers!"

"Say, don't you know bloodsuckers, Billy?"

"Stop your dancing and yelling that way. Looky, we've all got 'em, too, and we aren't acting like wild Injuns."

"Quit your yelling, Billy. They won't hurt you — just draw blood out-a you till you pull them off, or they get full and drop off."

"Look at me. I'm covered with them. Don't hurt a bit, either!"

When their words, and the meaning of them, got through Billy's head, he calmed down. When he saw how calmly the boys took their crop of the leeches, he discovered that he was far more frightened than hurt. Indeed, when they had settled down to the task of pulling the quiet, harmless little animals off their legs, Billy joined in the game, and found that there was no feeling at all when the blood oozed out. Soon he

began to feel a strange sort of envy instead of fear, when he found that some of his pals could count their bloodsuckers by the dozens, while his amounted to but half-dozens.

"I never heard of bloodsuckers before," he admitted sheepishly, after a bit. "What kind of things are they, anyway?"

"Kind of a worm, like an angleworm, only they suck blood from other animals for their living — food, I mean."

"Some folks call them leeches. Doctors use them sometimes to take blood out of folks when they have too much."

"Oh, I've heard of leeches. There's some in Grochau's drug store. The druggist keeps 'em in a jar of water, with some weeds."

"I know about them, too. Mr. Grochau told me lots of things. He says

you can tell if it's going to be a nice day or not by watching them."

"Why, how do they know, and how can they tell?"

"They can, though. If it's going to be rainy they come up; if it's going to be sunny they go down."

"But leeches are long and flat, not short and thick like these bloodsuckers."

"Oh, leeches are another kind of bloodsucker — tame ones, kind-a, for doctors to use."

"Say, they can stick to glass, even. One day, at the drug store, one leech was holding on to the jar by the tail, and another was holding on to him by the tail."

"Sometimes they're fierce, though. Mr. Grochau says if you put one full of blood in with others, they'll jump on him and start sucking the blood out-a him."

"Uncle Ben got his eye bumped and it was getting black, so a doctor put a leech on it and it sucked and sucked up all that blood and so he didn't have a black eye — a very black one — after all."

"My father says bloodsuckers get on cow's legs when they wade around in places where there are lots of weeds like this."

"My father found one once on a fish he was cleaning."

"Uncle Ben says fishes sometimes jump up out of the water to knock bloodsuckers off them."

"Say, I'm going to leave one bloodsucker on my leg, and see how long it'll stay on — how big it gets."

"Me, too. I can stand it to lose all the blood one of them can suck out-a me."

"I am, too, then," piped up Billy.

"Say, wasn't I a ninny to get so scared about them?"

"Oh, you didn't act up like my sister did. Why, she fainted when she got one on her once, wading in weedy water. It scared her awful; she shivers yet whenever you say 'bloodsucker' to her."

"Made me feel kind-a shivery first time I ever got bloodsucked."

"Me, too. I saw the blood coming and thought right away I was hurt."

"So did I," admitted Billy shyly, quite comforted to know he wasn't the only person, or rather the only boy, who had ever been fraid-catty over bloodsuckers.

SKIPPER JAP AND THE "WATER-WITCH"

"Say, if I'm going to get the wagon to soaking, it's time I was at it," remembered Jap, as the Gang were wading across the river to leave their water lilies with their other baggage.

"Sure, now's the time. Now we got these swimming togs on, we can slosh around all we like."

"The more we slosh the better it feels," said Windy, splashing water over himself to relieve the sunburn beginning to trouble him where his wet, bare shoulders had been exposed to the sun.

"Yes, till it dries. Then you're burned worse'n ever."

"We'll hafto take everything out of the wagon; then we can run her in where it's good and deep."

"Yes, right up close to the dam."

"That'll take all the rattles and squeaks out of her, sure."

"We can leave it in the water till we're ready to get out for good."

Everything was accordingly unpacked — hay, robes, fishing tackle, pail, the black bag most carefully of all, except perhaps the lunch basket, which had to be opened and sampled before the work could go on.

Billy, who felt rather more responsible for the bag than the others, hefted it when he and Windy had it stowed away under the tree with their other things, near where Old Dan took his ease in the shade until it should be time for him to get the expedition back to Mayville.

"A fine, good, new-looking bag," he pronounced it proudly.

"Hope nobody claims it; then we'll have it for our own."

"But if they do mebbe we'll have a good *re*-ward out of it, for finding it and bringing it along with us, and keeping it safe and taking such good care of it."

"Even the good-for-nothing papers inside."

"Traveling man's stuff, most likely."

"Best not to meddle, though, till we know just whose they are. We can always have a bonfire of them."

"Tell you, we can have it some night, in somebody's back yard, if his folks don't care, and have an Indian powwow around it."

"Let's, with feathers in our hair."

"And tomahawks out of pasteboard."

When the wagon was completely emptied, Tiny and Windy laid hold of one shaft, Billy and Reddy of the other, while Jap, as "boss" of the outfit for the day, was in the middle, pulling at

the whiffletree by both ends. It took a little tugging to get the wagon steered around and started, but after that the wagon ran itself down the bank, carrying the boys along with it.

"Hold back! She's running away!"

"Run, everybody! She'll be nipping off our heels!"

"No, don't run! Hold her back!"

"Hold her!"

"She won't hold back!"

"We all need breechens, that's the trouble!"

Though they leaned back on their shafts with all their might, the wagon had weight enough and gathered speed enough before they could slow it down to carry the boys along at a stiff clip down the short roadway to the river, where others had been driving from time to time, probably for the same purpose. Into the water they splashed. Windy

stubbed his toe and fell, Tiny stepped on him, the wagon wheel caught him, and for a moment there was great floundering and much excitement and a vast deal of noise.

When Windy came up spluttering, he was unhurt except for a scratch on his nose and a cut lip and a skinned shin. He'd lost his bloodsucker, and so all chance of winning the contest as to who could grow the biggest one and the longest-staying one. He made more fuss over this calamity than over all his bodily injuries combined.

"We should-a let the wagon go down backward," decided Reddy. "Then we could-a pulled back on her better."

The deepest place they could find in the stream at this point, several rods below the milldam, didn't reach the wagon box. Indeed, the river was so low thereabouts that, to give "her" a

good soaking, they swung the wagon about and ran it up toward the milldam, backward, until the box was about covered and the water was up to their own necks. There they parked the vehicle, with shafts hoisted in the air.

"Now we can find it again," laughed Tiny.

They frolicked about for some time, near the wagon, around the milldam, or on either sandy bank. Finally, it was discovered that Tiny and Jap were the only ones still ornamented with bloodsuckers. Thereupon Tiny declared he was going to give his every chance. Of course, Jap wouldn't be beaten if there was any way of winning the contest, so both laid themselves down upon the sand, to await the time the feasters should have finished dining.

"Mr. Grochau says that when a leech gets full of blood, and falls off, a doctor

will sometimes pull it through his fingers, to strip all the blood out of it he can. Then he can use the leech again sooner. They won't stick on anybody unless they're hungry."

Soon the three who were out of the race lost interest in bloodsuckers; they started a new game, that of burying themselves by idly scooping handfuls of sand up over their feet and then gently squiggling their toes until the sand was all shaken away from around them. It proved such an attractive game that Tiny and Jap forgot their blooksuckers and joined in the sport. So it came about that both in time discovered their leeches had fallen off, or been brushed off, and who won the contest has been a mystery ever since.

Next, Windy proposed that they wander upstream above the dam, on the far side of the river. This suggestion

was greeted with cheers, and all started off, across the river, up toward the big bridge. They kept to the land mainly, except when burning shoulders made them stop for a dip or to splash water over themselves as a cooling ointment, thereby adding moisture to the fire and so creating a steam that quickened the roasting process, as a cook bastes a turkey to make it tender. But that they didn't realize to the full extent of the damage until the next day, when mothers and sisters were invited to "come on with the salve" in hopes of curing the soreness, or at least of stopping that painful "crackle" of blistered skin whenever they moved.

In this manner they rambled and scampered along, until they found themselves under the big bridge, from which folks coming from Mayville way caught their first glimpse of the mill.

"Hurray, a boat!" Jap called out, his voice booming back from the bridge floor as though he had shouted into a great barrel.

"Hurray, a boat!" the chorus boomed back, and the four followed Jap's quick sprint along the bank to where an old rowboat lay, half in the water, half out of it.

"Whoop-ee! Oars and everything!"

"Say, let's have a boat ride!"

"Sure, if we can get her emptied!"

With mighty tugs and a sturdy tussle with the water-logged old craft, the boys got it up on the bank and overturned.

"Say, looky! Here's her name — Water —"

"Water-Witch!"

"Let's see if the old witch'll float."

"Sure she will. She's too water-soaked to leak any more till she dries out again!"

"Well, who's going to do the rowing?"

"I can roar some. My father let me try one day, and I did it real well, he said," offered Jap.

"Well, if you can roar as good on the oars as you do on the lines, I'll risk you."

"Me, too."

"Pile in, everybody."

"But you want to remember the water's deep up here, and sit still."

"Aw! I can swim in deep water, I can."

"Mebbe you can, Tiny, but I can't. So don't you go trying any monkey-shining."

"My father says never rock the boat when you're in it, even if you can swim."

"All right, I won't."

"All right. Push her off, Tiny."

So the "Water-Witch," with Skipper Jap at the oars issuing commands most freely as to the actions, or rather the

non-actions, of his passengers, got under way. Tiny was perched on the narrow seat, in the bow, Billy sat flat on the bottom at his feet, Skipper Jap had the middle seat between the oarlocks, Reddy and Windy were prim and quiet in the broad stern seat.

With much tongue work, and a vast amount of lost motion due to oars that went too deep or didn't take hold deep enough or never even touched the water, to say nothing of the advice his crew offered in plenty, the skipper in time got his craft out into the current. There progress was easy, except as Jap's awkward floundering with the oars splashed and sprayed the water rather than "feathered" it, and so rather delayed the action of the current with the "Water-Witch."

"Say, you'll be banging a hole in the side of this old tub if you don't watch

out what you're doing," cried Billy, as Jap swung an oar wildly around and dealt the "Water-Witch" a resounding blow.

"Or my head," warned Tiny, ducking the flying blade rather awkwardly but successfully.

"Say, if any of you fellows can roar better than I can, just come try it," Jap responded a bit peevishly, naturally somewhat nervous and excited. Besides, he was getting more advice than a skipper usually permits from crew or passengers.

"No, don't. My father says never change places in midstream."

"You're doing fine!"

"Sure you are. Just see how far we've come, and you've hardly roared a bit yet."

There followed a few quiet moments, except for the splashes and thwacks and

wild above-water flourishes of the oars. Then, suddenly — crack!

"What was that!" cried three voices in unison.

"Say, remember I'm sitting behind you!" piped up Billy in a wild little squeak that ended in a loud alarm shout. "Say, you hit Tiny!"

"Tiny's overboard!" Tiny's overboard!" bawled Windy.

"You knocked him overboard!"

"He'll drownd sure this time, if you knocked him senseless."

"What'll we do?"

"Somebody get out and try to find him."

"Dive for him, somebody."

"Yes, but who?"

"No, sit still — don't tip the boat over or we surely can't save him."

"Hurray! He's all right!" shouted Reddy, peering around his side of the

boat. "He's come up. He's right alongside the boat!"

"Here he is again, good as new!"

"Hurray! Here he is."

Just then Tiny's wet head peeped over the up-ended bow of the boat.

"Who's monkeyshining now, I'd like to know?"

"'Scuse," murmured Jap over his shoulder, taking a long breath at the sight of his buddy safe and sound and saucy as ever.

"Well, I'm lots safer out-a the 'Water Witch' than in. I can swim, and Jap can't row."

"I guess that's right," rejoined Jap, still apologetic.

"Say, I'm going overboard, too!"

"Me, too. I can hold on to the boat with one hand and be safe, if I can't swim good."

"I'll stick to the boat," decided Billy.

So soon Skipper Jap of the "Water-Witch" had but one passenger; the others were swimming about him, or alongside, like a school of young porpoises, taking care to keep out of the way of Jap's oars. Finally, seeing how well these three did, even Billy decided to try it outside, with the boat for a floating buoy.

This venture into deeper waters than they had heretofore tried, with the boat for company, proved such good sport that the boys didn't notice that the hum of the mill and the roar of the milldam below them was growing louder and nearer all the time. When they did discover it, they were only a few rods above the falls, out in the deep current and headed straight for the lowest part of the milldam, where the water flowed over in considerable volume.

"It rows lots easier; mebbe I'm

beginning to learn," Jap was congratulating himself when —

"Stop her!" yelled Windy. "We're going over the dam!"

"Hold her! We'll break the boat all to pieces if it goes over!"

"Our necks, too!"

"And mebbe the wagon down there. Hold her!"

"I can't hold her! Help! I can't hold her!"

"We'll drownd in this deep water if we let go!"

"And we'll go over the dam if we don't leggo!"

"What'll we do now?"

Helpless and considerably frightened, the boys that were outside the boat clung to it like leeches. The skipper struggled valiantly with his oars, but his puny strength and awkward swings were powerless against the current, already

gathering force with the pull from the falls.

Wild-eyed they watched the crest of the dam draw nearer and nearer, while the sound of it seemed deafening to their alarmed senses. Each boy could already picture himself dashed to pieces on the apron below.

"We'll be busted to smithereens, boat and all!" shouted Windy, hoarse with fear.

But what could they do? Nothing, except with horror-bulged eyes — and ears as well — watch that spillway draw nearer and nearer, listen to it grow louder and more threatening.

Soon they were a boat length away, then half, then only a foot. Then, to their horror, the bow seemed about to shoot off into the air, preparatory to taking its wild death tumble.

But, while every lad's hair stood on

end, or felt that way, it so prickled in his scalp, and even blistered shoulders seemed breaking out in cold goose pimples of fear, Tiny, up nearest the bow on one side of the boat, gave a loud shout.

"Hey! I'm touching bottom. Come on, fellows! We're safe. Help! We can pull her around sidewise! Then she can't go over!"

For, though the boys hadn't known it until that instant, a milldam is built like half of the roof of a building, or like a lean-to, with the ridgepole for the crest of the dam, and rafters covered with planking running from it upstream but toward the bottom of the river, as the roof of a house slopes to the eaves. This is intended to keep ice and other floating material, also the current, from battering at the crest of the dam and from wearing the wall away between top

and bottom. Without this planking, any wall across a stream, even of heavy stones, would be broken down in a short time.

With this roof-like boardwork to stand on, the boys easily pulled the "Water-Witch" around so the bottom of the stern end bunted up against the crest of the dam, after which it was an easy matter to tug it ashore.

They didn't try to row it back to where they had found it, but towed it along, canal-boat fashion, by the rope at its bow, while they themselves remained on the river bank. All the way they were hilariously twitting themselves over the good scare they had had, punctuating their shouts occasionally with more serious thoughts of what might have happened to them if that planking hadn't been there.

"Well, it was, so we're safe this time."

"But I'm going to learn to roar a boat yet," maintained Skipper Jap, who somehow felt that his cruise in the "Water-Witch" had not been wholly to his credit.

"Well, better start on a 'Sailor Boy' or a 'Jolly Rover,' 'stead of a 'Water-Witch,'" warned Reddy.

REDDY TO THE RESCUE

When the boys decided they had been in the water long enough, they also decided that the wagon was well soaked. They got it out of the depths where it had been parked and up in shallow water where a rather well-marked driveway cut across from river edge to the road considerably higher up.

"Say, it's going to be a tug, getting her up this steep bank," said Reddy when all stopped to rest a bit on the sand.

"I know," spoke up resourceful Tiny. "Let's leave her here until we get ready to hitch up to go home, then Old Dan can pull her uphill."

"Good work," applauded Windy, tapping Tiny's head fondly. "Some think you thunk, that think!"

"Thanks," murmured Tiny.

The boys lay about on the sand for a time, then rinsed the sand off their bodies and out of their trunks, and dressed.

"Guess I'll go see what time it is, and how Mr. Grannis is getting on with the grinding," said Jap while he was buttoning his waist.

They all trailed along to help him "see."

"Three-fifteen," the miller told them. "It'll be about an hour before I get to your grist."

They discussed what to do next, and decided to investigate the region of that small gully where the mill road crossed the little bridge just above the mill. Following the trickling stream up the gully, they came across another flowing well, even larger than the one by the mill, and loitered about there, on the

oak-shaded bank, for some time. A catbird entertained them right royally, fluting and flirting away in the tree tops, now here, now there, now with one song, then another, with bluebird, robin, thrasher, and blackbird notes jumbled in with his own.

Finally they were back to the little bridge, where they stopped for another idle moment, leaned on the railing in the sun, tit-tat-toe, five in a row, good-pal fashion.

"Be a fine skating place, this mill pond," remarked Jap.

"The ice'd be thick and slick as glass, wouldn't it?"

"Let's come some time next winter and try it."

"Sure; get an early start and spend all day here."

"Don't have any was-sips for alarm clocks, though!"

"No danger; they'd all be killed off by then, 'cept the queens that are going to live over till spring to start new families. But they'd be fast asleep for the winter, so no danger from them, either."

"How d'you know all that about was-sip queens?"

"Read it, 'course. Don't you ever read books and things?"

"Sure I do, only I never read that."

"Well, mebbe you will some day; and if you don't, you know it now."

"But let's do come. I'll ask Father for Old Dan again, and we could blanket him and he'd be all right."

"And bring some eggs to cook, and weenies, mebbe, and other such good stuff."

"Say, keep still! I hear something."

Reddy held up a warning hand, and put himself into a listening attitude, one

ear cocked toward the river bank up beyond, his eyes popped as if to aid his hearing. Of course the other boys imitated him, but didn't know just what sort of noise to listen for.

"Not the mill exploding again?" whispered Windy.

"Or somebody chewing thirty-five chokecherries?" Jap jibed him in return.

"Keep still, fellows!"

"Just something splashing in the water up above," Billy decided, and lost interest.

It was a splashing noise, too, and seemed to come from a clump of alders, cat-tails, reeds, and such river plants that screened from their sight a little bend in the bank up beyond, about halfway to the big bridge.

"Yes, but it's something else. Listen, all of you!" insisted Reddy.

So they hushed again, all ears and eyes as he was.

Soon came a most peculiar noise. It turned the boys rather chill, in spite of the fact that they were out in the full afternoon sunlight — that mixture of a groan and a moan, a cough and a wheeze, as of something in great pain, or fear, or despair.

"Something's in trouble up there," decided Reddy.

With the words, away he dashed, off the bridge, down the road, then through reeds and mud and bushes, forgetful of his bare legs and the scratches they would probably get. But when danger threatens any helpless or trapped creature the rescuer rightly forgets his own comfort in an effort to be of service.

And, of course, the faithful four were off behind him, as close as his running start would permit.

It took them some little time to work their way along toward the splashing and the wheezing. And sometimes they lost it, as if whatever was making the sounds had become still and silent.

"What could it be?" they wondered, to themselves and to one another, as they sped along. But this time no one could quote anything "Father" had read, or "Uncle Ben" had experienced, that would explain the strange sounds.

Then, suddenly, Reddy, still in the lead, gave a loud yell.

"Kids! Hurry, hurry! He'll be drownded, sure!"

And he disappeared among the bushes, still urging them to greater speed.

"What can it be, d'you s'pose?" they puffed, sprinting their best gait.

When they got to the place where Reddy had been when he discovered the

cause of the commotion, they saw a queer sight.

A top-buggy was in the bayou up to the hubs. Between the shafts, or where they would be if they could be seen through the water that covered them, lay a horse, still hitched to the vehicle, but mired in the mucky water. Worse, he was down on his side, and it was only by turning his neck that he could lift his head out of water. Indeed, his nose was all that was to be seen of him, except as in his struggles he raised himself somewhat out of the water. Then, before their horrified eyes, the old horse gave a sort of moaning snort and let his nose sink down below the safety line.

Reddy was darting in and out of the reeds and brush, keeping to the edge of the bayou while still making his path as short as possible.

And to their joy, as they splashed

along in his wake, they saw the old horse lift his head again, proof that he was not quite gone yet. But his tired old neck was weak with the strain, and he was letting it settle below the water again just as Reddy reached him.

With a yank at the bridle he lifted the old fellow's head, and cradled it in his arms, wet and muddy though it was.

"Hurry, hurry, fellows!" he panted.

The boys came dashing to his help, commenting as they ran.

"Must-a wandered off down the road."

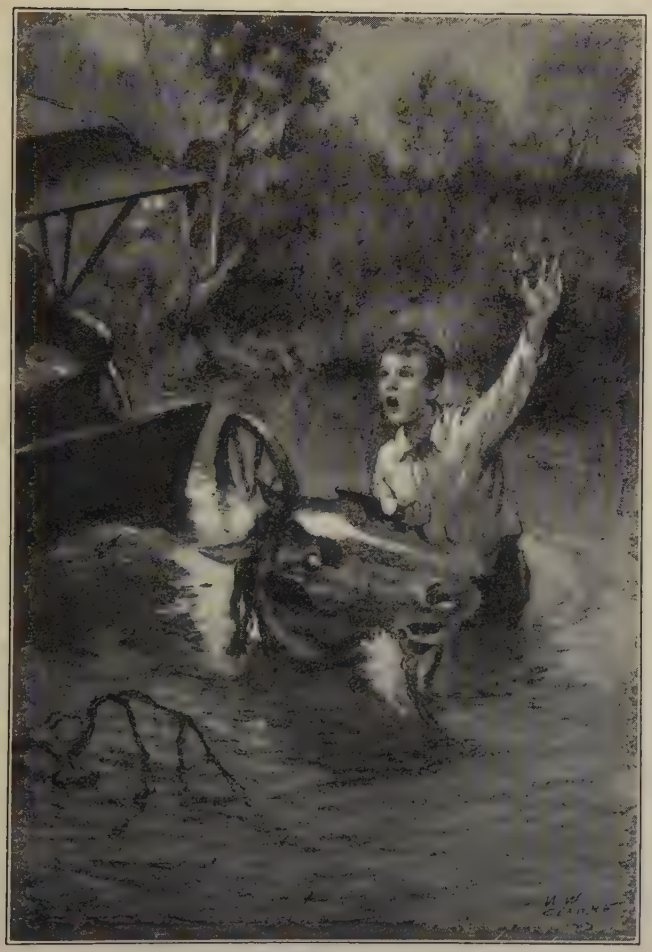
"And come here to get a drink —"

"And got mired down!"

"And mebbe tangled up in his harness."

"Say, lucky Reddy heard him in time."

"How we going to get him loose, though?"



"Hurry, hurry fellows!" Reddy panted

"Got to get him unhitched quick as we can, that's sure."

"A little more and he'd-a been a dead horse, all right."

"Good work, Reddy, old scout, getting to the rescue that way!"

"Hurry!" called Reddy. "He's tired out and I have to hold the whole weight of him, seems like."

"Unhook the traces, quick!"

The boys felt for the whiffletree, and, working under water, tried to unhook the traces. But the sag of the horse's body against them drew them taut, and perhaps, too, his legs were across them. He was well tangled up, for the lines had been dragged under with him. Altogether, he was in a sorry plight — bound, mired, weary, drowning.

"His old neck's 'bout broken, he's been trying to hold it out of the water so long," condoled Reddy.

The old horse agreed, with a sort of snorting sigh, his big brown eyes on Reddy's.

"But what'll we do now? We can't unhook the traces, or untangle him, or get him up hitched to the buggy this way."

"Let's pull him up."

But the old fellow couldn't help himself, so the boy's couldn't stir him, tug and push as they might.

Then Reddy came to the rescue for the second time.

"Cut the traces!" he commanded, as a captain might order his crew to "Man the boats!" in a last resort to save endangered passengers.

The bold idea caused the boys to catch their breath with amazement, but they never faltered. Out came four jackknives of various sizes, lengths, and degrees of sharpness, and all set to work

sawing on the traces, as they could be found underwater.

"Say, Jap, try to unhook the lines from his bridle," called Reddy.

Jap flew to obey, and tugged manfully at a tight buckle, his knife between his teeth to save the time of putting it back into his pocket. Billy quickly followed his example on the other rein, for, with his feet tangled in the lines, the old horse was pulling hard at his own head, and so making the weight on Reddy's arms all the greater.

"Whew! this leather's tough," puffed Tiny, for of course his dull and nicked knife blade, last used to open a tin can, could not be blamed for his lack of progress.

"Say, we'll never get these traces sawed through," agreed Windy. "Seems like I been cutting hours now, and I've just nicked this one."

"Cut 'em at the eye, then you'll have only half as far to go," was Jap's idea.

"Say, you and Billy run around and push the buggy up closer, then mebbe Windy and Tiny can unhook the traces," directed Reddy.

But the breech band and its straps wouldn't permit the buggy to come any closer, no matter how hard the two pushed against it. So horse and helpers had to wait patiently until the four, taking turns with their different knives, could saw through the stout leather traces, at the top of the eye.

By this combination of wit and force, the boys presently had the horse free from the buggy, and also from his entangling lines and other harness parts. Then, with encouraging pulls at the bridle, and shoves at his shoulders and flanks, they got the old fellow to his feet and up on dry land.

He was pretty shaky at first, but Reddy cheered him with pats and gentle words, while the other four rolled the buggy out into the meadow grass. They couldn't hitch the horse to his wagon again, because of his trembling legs and cut tugs.

"Say, whoever this rig belongs to will wonder who cut those traces, and why!"

"And if they find out it was us, they'll say it's just like a boy, always up to mischief."

"I know: Write a note and tie it to the whip."

"Good idea. Who's got a pencil, though, and where's the paper?"

"I've got a pencil," and out came a stubby one that only a boy would think worth saving.

In the buggy they found a package wrapped in paper, from which they took a piece large enough for a note to

explain what they had done, and why. Then they tied the horse to a tree, with a line long enough to permit his lying down in comfort, or grazing if he liked.

"Guess he won't need a drink right away," they agreed, when all was done.

"Well, seeing we saved his life, and got our clothes wet and muddy, his owner shouldn't complain about the traces," said Reddy.

"That's right, too."

And they started back to the mill, each one abeam over a good deed done, feeling amply rewarded in the certainty of having done it as well as the circumstances permitted, content with having done it even if they never saw the owner whom their prompt action had benefited. The sight of the old horse, even though he was wet and muddy and weak and trembling, was a pleasant enough picture to hang on the walls of memory.

THEY FIND SOME FEARSOME FOOTPRINTS

Back at the mill once more, the boys all had to have a drink to "wet their whistles," as they put it, since they had done so much calling and shouting and talking in connection with rescuing the old horse that their throats were quite dry and stiff by the time they could visit the flowing well.

Windy, the first one to reach the spot, burst into a grin that showed all his teeth.

"Looky what I spy," he said, pointing into the drinking trough.

Each of the four crowded up, probably each with a different picture in his mind of what he'd find there. And probably not one of them imagined what he really did see — a big watermelon

floating like a water-logged old boat in the tank.

"Say, whose do you s'pose —?"

"How did it get —?"

"My! that'll be a good one."

"It will that. Listen to her plunk!"

"Say, no meddling!"

"No plink about that melon, for a fact!"

"No hurt to touch it."

"My, don't you wish —?"

"But 'taint!"

'Twas, though, at least a big share of it, for just then they heard Mr. Grannis calling to them from the mill porch.

"Bring it along, boys. I got it out of my garden awhile ago, and it ought to be cold by now."

"Watermelon on ice!" gasped the boys in delight.

Be sure they brought it along, with great care, and also that on that cool,

pleasant, singsongy mill porch they enjoyed the next half-hour, eating watermelon the very best way it can be eaten, in those big half-moons that literally make one's mouth water from ear to ear.

But, as all good things must come to an end in time, the big melon was finished, to the last shallow-dished end, the two pieces that left their proud winners, Tiny and Windy, wet from nose to chin. Gnawed down to the white, the rinds were still worth saving, in a pail, for the miller's pigs, so he said.

"Now, boys, I'm ready to grind your sack of wheat. Want to follow it over the mill with me?"

Of course they did, though they felt so highly honored with the invitation to help grind their sack of wheat that they colored to the tips of their ears, just as though the miller had told them they didn't dare step inside the place.

First he brought his little two-wheeled handbarrow, or barrow-truck, as he called it, a kind of ladder ending in handles at the top of the two braced supports, and finished at the bottom with a little platform and a couple of wheels. He thrust the platform under the sack of wheat as it leaned up against the mill wall, pulled the top of the sack forward while bracing the truck with one foot, and, with the sack standing on the truck, trundled the wheat into the mill.

He wheeled it over to a box with a funnel-shaped bottom which he called the "hopper." With a deft forward move of the truck he stood the sack up against the hopper, leaned the truck against a shaft, untied the sack, looked at the wheat, nodded his head to indicate it was good grain, then, catching the sack in his strong arms, lifted it up and emptied it into the hopper.

"You know the fairy story of the wicked old witch the miller pushed into the hopper, I suppose?" he asked, as they stood watching the wheat swirl down through the bottom of the hopper, whirlpool fashion.

"And she was never seen again," nodded Windy.

"It must-a spoilt the flour, that day, though," remarked Jap.

"No," laughed the miller, "not really. People, I'm glad to say, are almost never as bad as the fairy stories make the bad ones out to be; and the miller couldn't hurt the old witch much by pushing her into the hopper. See, if she could get through that small opening at the bottom, here's what would become of her."

He pointed to a hole in the floor, where, at their feet, down in the cellar, the boys saw a sieve-like platform

that kept shaking back and forth. On it danced a thin layer of the wheat that poured through the bottom of the hopper, and they saw that while the wheat dropped through the holes in the platform, the coarse seeds and little sticks and bits of straw and chaff stayed on the screen, to be pushed off at the bottom of the jiggling "table" into a pile of "screenings" on the floor of the cellar.

"She'd be just chicken feed, you see," laughed the miller.

Well, they followed the course of the wheat all through the mill, down cellar, back to the ground floor, upstairs and down, through the millstones. Not that they themselves followed it there, of course, nor through any of the many different machines, but just saw it go in and come out again, through the rolls that worked like wringers, into the bolter

that went round and round like the cradle on a binder but was covered with very fine silk cloth that sifted the flour, and finally back downstairs again, and round about, until the flour was trickling slowly down from a spout into the very sack, a clean one, Mrs. Munson had given them for the flour.

The miller explained the workings of the many different machines, and even opened up a little trapdoor, or a slide, here and there, to let them peep into the thing. Often he stopped to sample a stream of flour by catching a bit of a trickling stream of it to rub between thumb and finger. He invited them to test the fineness of it as the flour left one machine on its way to another, which they did very solemnly, with great respect for the educated fingertips of the miller that could tell which flour out of which machine was the finest.

Now, on the second floor, or the third counting the basement of the mill, there was a narrow open stairway that led to the platform about a great piece of machinery where the flour was bolted. The second time the miller went up there, he invited them to follow him, with the advice that they be careful not to touch any belts or wheels. One side of this overhead platform ran along just above a big bin that was half full of wheat.

"Say, it'd be fun to jump down there," spoke up Windy.

"All right," said the miller. "Play there all you like, just so you don't touch any machinery anywhere up here."

Away he went, leaving them to romp and race through the deep wheat, or go sailing from the platform down into it. Tag was a favorite sport, as running in

the wheat was much like floundering through deep snow.

All at once Windy let out a startled "Oh!" that they all heard above the whirr of the mill and their own shouts. When they looked at him, his eyes were as big as gray stone mugs, or at least seemed that big.

"Look!"

He pointed to the side of the bin, the boarded-up side, with a finger that fairly shook with excitement.

It shook with good reason, too; for, as if walking right up the side of the bin, were footprints — big, red ones, made by a human foot, a man's foot, dipped in — could it be? — in *blood!* Yet so it appeared, for through the film of dust that glazed the boards the footprints glowed scarlet as could be — heels, soles, toes. And a row of them going right up the wall!

The boys gasped, looking first at these fearsome tracks, then at one another. And into each mind flashed the memory of the wicked miller in the fairy story. Could it be — Mr. Grannis — had —?

"Not an old witch, course, but —"

Windy pointed downward. They caught his idea, and all looked the way he pointed, as if expecting to see spurts of blood, or even a human body, rise right up out of the wheat at their very feet.

"Mebbe — some one — some one the miller — didn't — like —"

"Had a grudge against — mebbe —"

"My father read about a man burying — a woman — in his cellar —"

"Uncle Ben knows a man that found —"

"But he couldn't *walk* up a *wall!*"

"But it's feet — a man's feet — a big man's feet!" they chattered, cold with

fright, each one able to say but a few words at a time.

"Say, what if he — Mr. Grannis — is an *ogre!*"

"Like in Jack the-Giant-Killer."

"Do we dast dig down — in the wheat — and see?"

"Sh — sh! I'm too scairt to —"

"But sometimes — folks — boys, even — find things nobody else —"

"Not even detec-a-tives — can find —"

"Sure. Grandfather knows about a boy that found —"

"So does Uncle Ben; the boy found a —"

"Well, well!" boomed out a loud voice above them; and, when their frightened glances flew aloft to discover the miller on the platform there, every boy felt his hair rise just as Jack-the-Giant-Killer's must have done when he heard the giant booming his "Fe-fi-fo-fum!"

"You were so quiet I thought I'd lost you, or made you into flour — like the wicked miller in the fairy story."

And that only frightened them the more. He was looking for them, then, maybe to —

The thought failed them, it was so horrible; for now the fear that had engulfed them was so great that a sort of brain paralysis had set in and they could only goggle wildly up at Mr. Grannis, then back to those bloody footprints.

"Oh, ho!" laughed the miller, noticing just then where their eyes were directed when they weren't looking up at him. "You've discovered those bloody footprints of mine! Ha-ha, I'll have to tell you about them."

And down came the miller plump into the wheat bin, just as though he, too, were a boy. And, even in their fear, there was no mistaking now the amused

expression he wore. There was some joke about it, then! Surely, from his look, there was a funny story tucked away in those footprints, not a tragical one!

Windy, reassured more by the miller's laugh than by his own reasoning or natural good sense, came back to his normal wits once more, out of the land of fairy lore and imagination into which he had wandered for the moment, taking the Gang with him.

"What — what did — did make them, Mr. Grannis?" he asked.

"You see, when I had this bin put in here, I bought the lumber from the dealer in Dow City, the one next to the tanyard there. Now the mixture used there in tanning leathers is red; hemlock bark, they use, and it's a blood red, as you see. Some barefooted workman, and a big-footed splayfoot, too, judging by

the prints of his feet, walked along that board, staining it red wherever he stepped, for a joke, probably, or maybe by accident. When the carpenter saw it, he added to the joke by nailing the board up in that way, so the footprints seem to be walking right up the side of the bin. Looks funny, doesn't it?"

"Yes," grinned the Gang, sheepishly glancing at one another sidewise.

For they had had a good example of that remark of the miller's: "People, I'm glad to say, are almost never as bad as the fairy stories make the bad ones out to be."

Usually they aren't as bad as our imaginations can make them out, either.

HOMEWARD BOUND

What a wonderfully interesting day it had been, anyway, the Gang agreed, during the vastly exciting experience of getting Old Dan hitched up and everything packed — fishing tackle, lunch basket, hay, pail, blankets, and such paraphernalia as they had brought from home, to say nothing, or rather, a great deal, if the whole story of each were to be told over again, of the water lilies that filled Old Dan's pail, and chiefly of the black leather bag.

"Some bag," they pronounced it once more, while hoisting it aboard and storing it away under the seat.

"That ought to be worth a good *re*-ward!"

The miller helped load in the part sack of flour — to tell the truth he did

the work and they helped him — and the part sack of bran the wheat had also made.

"Well, boys, had a fine day of it?"

"Dandy!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Well, come again some time. Maybe the river and the mill can offer you some further adventures."

"We sure will."

"Good. Be glad to see you — all three of us will. Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

And off they started, Jap at the lines, Windy and Tiny on the seat with him, Billy and Reddy in the very back of the spring wagon, on the hay, dandling their legs out over the end gate.

Mr. Grannis stood watching them from the mill porch, arms akimbo, his flour-dusted overalls and shirt, and straw hat turned up in the back, giving

him a particularly softened, gentle, good-hearted, boyish look.

"Guess I'll be a miller when I grow up," murmured Billy.

"Me, too. Let's be pardners and have this very mill," replied Reddy in the same happy mood.

"Let's, and when Windy and Tiny and Jap send their boys to mill with wheat, we'll let them look all around inside, too."

"Good-by!" they called, as Old Dan started on a little jog trot down the hill that would take them out of sight of the mill for a time.

"Good-by! And come again!" waved the miller.

Over the little bridge at the foot of the hill they trundled, and past the bayou where they had rescued the old horse from his watery grave.

"Good-by, Old Scout!" they waved

"Good-by! And come again!" waved the miller

to the old fellow, still tied to his tree and grazing as peacefully as though he had not been very near to death not many half-hours before.

"Good-by and thanks!" he nickered, to which Old Dan replied with an understanding word or so of greeting, congratulation, and farewell.

Then the Old Scout went back to his grazing, and the last they saw of him was the switch of his stubby gray tail, fighting flies. But they knew he would be well looked after, for they had told the miller all about him, and had Mr. Grannis' promise that if the old horse was still there after supper he would care for him until his owners came searching for him.

The turn that hid the Old Scout from sight took them from the mill road into the kitty-cornered road that would carry them across the big river bridge, and

so on for over a mile, where they would be back on the Black-and-White Trail and headed straight for Mayville. Crossing the big bridge, with its clattering iron framework above, was still a sort of adventure, which they enjoyed to the full.

"Good-by, old Water-Witch!" they greeted the rowboat that had given them a short ride and a shorter fright, and which they had left drawn on the bank in better shape than they had found it, since it was now emptied of water and ready for whoever wanted to use it again.

"She's still riding the waves," nodded Jap, her ex-skipper, rather proudly, feeling a sort of responsibility for her well-being though his command of her had been brief and stormy.

"Hurray, there's the miller! Good-by, Mr. Grannis!" cried Windy, as he

pointed donwstream to the mill, alight in the western sun.

Mr. Grannis was leaning out of a window that commanded a good view of the mill pond and of the big bridge, and when he took off his hat to wave to them in return the golden sunlight brightening that whole side of the mill set his shock of curly white hair gleaming.

"Hurray! Good-by!" they waved and called, and then, inspired by Tiny, they set up a song of farewell that was wholly hearty if not altogether musical:

Good-by, Miller!
Good-by, Miller!
Good-by, Miller!
We're going to leave you now!

Everybody cheered and waved, including Mr. Grannis, until Old Dan clop-clopped off the bridge and trees hid mill and miller from sight.

"Say, what do you guess he'll miss us. Bet it'll seem lonesome without us," remarked Tiny.

"I guess yes!" agreed they all.

Along the wooded, kitty-cornered road they rolled toward home, as fast as Old Dan's now remarkably spry old legs wanted to carry them. He, too, seemed to think the journey homeward quite an adventure; at least, he set off as though he expected to find something interesting in the trip. Perhaps at the very end of the journey?

"Hurray, the Black and White-Trail!" they hailed the highroad, with a flourish of five battered pieces of headgear, at the first glimpse of its zigzag-marked telephone poles on ahead, a white *Z* on a black band.

This point safely made, Tiny suggested that it was time to eat. And right here it might as well be confessed

that that was the very last time the lunch basket was opened that day, because when they shut it up again it was quite empty, even of crumbs, the few that remained in it after the last cooky and sandwich and piece of cake were taken out, being scattered in the road for the birds.

"Here's your Dow City signboard," greeted this landmark when they reached it.

"And there's Farmer Bingham's road," piped up Windy, indicating the crossroad that they passed over at this point.

"My, but we'll know this road good by the time we get through working for Mr. Bingham next week!" gloated Jap, who expected to drive the crowd back and forth, with Old Dan's help, and his father's consent, both of which might safely be taken for granted, his father

and Old Dan being listed among Jap's best pals.

"Say, remember that auto that went whizzing along here just as we got to that hill on Farmer Bingham's road?"

"And the one that looked like Sheriff Meining's, this morning?"

"Here's where Billy jumped out to read that 'Free Camping Grounds for Tourists' sign, too. See his feetprints in the dust?"

"Sure I can."

Billy knew Reddy and Windy didn't see them, because he peeped over and didn't see them himself; the road had been too well traveled since then. But he beamed just the same.

In fact, they all glowed with jollity and good cheer. What fun it all was, anyway, this going back over the road, and these joyous cries of "Here's where," and "Remember how," and the pleasant

memories it brought back! Indeed, they found that the road was well dotted with recollections for them, places not marked on the route book tourists would follow, but unforgetably inscribed on the charts of their boyish minds.

"Here's where that first auto passed us!"

"No, it's farther on."

"'Tis, too, the place. Here's the culvert they hit going past us."

"No, this is a different one. We've got to go farther."

"It's this one. I know, 'cause after that I kept a close lookout and we went over three more before we turned at the Dow City sign. This is the fourth one from that crossroad, so it's the one."

"Hi, then! Let's look for the can of bait."

"Naw! Who cares for bait now?"

"But the fishhooks in it!"

"Who cares for fishhooks? We've caught our fish."

"I want mine. They cost me a quarter, and then I had to catch my fish without one."

This argument caused Jap to rein Old Dan to a stop, much as the old fellow hated to have his homeward jaunt interrupted. He gaped over it considerably, and pretended not to hear their loud "Whoas!" or to feel the bit against his jaws as they all pulled on the lines, but finally he was prevailed on to jolt into a dead stop.

Billy and Reddy got out to search the ditch, but Tiny and Windy remained in the wagon to help hold Old Dan, uneasy and restless over the delay, and much inclined to bring it to a close.

"Whoa!"

"Hurry up. Old Dan wants to get on home."

"Come on, he won't wait much longer."

"Leave 'em go and come get into the wagon."

They did wait longer, though, till Reddy found the can in the dry, weedy ditch where it had bounced, and came running up with it. Everyone applauded the successful search, especially Old Dan, who expressed his delight by breaking into a good trot before the two had more than caught the rear of the wagon box with elbows and stomachs.

The fishhooks were safe; and, to finish up their story right now, they are put carefully away among their owners' choice possessions, ready for the next time the Gang goes to mill. The worms were also fresh and undamaged, but are not put carefully away for future use. The boys mourned over the waste as Reddy let them dribble out of the can

into the road, but doubtless the birds that happened upon them the next morning thanked their lucky stars that it had rained dewworms along that stretch of road.

"Here's where we met up with the ghost!" they giggled from time to time, whenever they thought that spot should be just about reached. It never was decided just when they passed the identical place where that wisp of moonlit fog had so deceived their boyish senses for a time. It was on a little bridge, but there were several along the way, and, as no one had taken pains to count them off, as Windy had the culverts, they couldn't agree on the exact spot.

But one "Here's where" was not to be so overlooked, for the strong taint in the air still lingered to mark the hill where they had so narrowly missed a

most unpleasant encounter with the wood pussy.

"Wow!" they agreed to a man, as Old Dan slowed down to climb the hill.

"I s'pose everyone that went along here today said something about a skunk being around in the night," tittered Tiny.

"But we're the only ones that really know just when it was!"

"And we don't know just when, only that it was awfully early this morning."

"Or awfully late last night."

And, of course, they must hail every sign with cheers: "Mayville 5 Mi."; "Mayville 4 Mi. Stop At Brown's"; "Mayville 3¼ Mi. Save The Pieces" (which they jeered noisily); "Mayville 3 Mi.," then 2. At last it was just growing dusk; they rounded a hilltop and there lay "Mayville 1 Mi." on ahead, the street lights twinkling them a friendly greeting from beyond the fields.

"Almost in, now!"

"Wonder if the folks have missed us today!"

"An early start!"

"And a late getting-home!"

"Hurray — some day!"

"Sure has been."

"My, makes me feel a hundred years old, going along this way and thinking of all the things we've seen and done today!"

"Seems like a hundred years since we saw Mayville last, for a fact!"

"Two hundred!"

"A thousand!"

"A million! Say, any gray hairs in my head?"

"No, they're all red yet, Reddy."

"I s'pose this is the way we'll feel when we're old men — things'll keep reminding us of things that happened, like they do Grandfather."

Which wise Windy remark is very true. Life is considerably like a day's journey; old age is like a going back along the way, with the thoughts more on what has happened than on what is king place now or is to come.

If only, when the Gang are white-haired men, all their memories may be as good and happy, as merry and joyous, as bright and loving, as these of their day at the mill! Then they may truly call themselves successful. For only a man in whose memories no evil and ill will have place, but just good deeds well done and innocent, harmless pleasures shared and enjoyed, is, in God's sight, a successful man.

BUDDIES ALL IN THE BIG REWARD

"Whoo-whoo!"

"Hip-hip-hurray!"

"Hello, Father! We're back!"

"Hello, Mr. Munson! Here we are!"

"Hurray! The Gang's all here!"

"Well, well, here they are, Mother!" Mr. Munson greeted the five as they came clop-clopping and cheering through the alley in the dusky twilight, and drew up in the side yard.

Out they leaped from the spring wagon, for what they had thought would be the end of their wonderfully exciting day, except for the pleasant memories it would always have for them. But no, there was still more.

"Supper!" called Mrs. Munson from the kitchen door. "Supper, everybody.

Hot biscuit and honey, boys! Wash up, quick, and come right in!"

"Run along, boys, I'll look after Old Dan," Mr. Munson told them. "Leave things in the wagon till after supper; they'll wait and the biscuit won't."

"Come on, kids," Jap urged the hesitating four, and led the way to the washroom, the willing quartette at once close at his heels.

Tiny was the first to finish washing, and disappeared. But in a minute, while the others were still toweling their wet faces, he was back, with a handful of water lilies, shyly offering them to Mrs. Munson.

"Water lilies! Why, bless your heart, Tiny Long, how did you know I love them?"

"I guess 'cause all women and girls do," he grinned, blushing with pleasure to see her hurry to get them into a green

earthenware bowl on the supper table, right in the center, for ornament.

Then, around the table, aglow under the electric chandelier and loaded with good things, the boys had that great delight second only to enjoying an experience originally, and that is telling all about it.

And it didn't interfere with their enjoyment of the biscuit and honey and other "eats," because one could tell a few lines while the other four refreshed the inner boy. With Mr. and Mrs. Munson's interest in the day's doings to keep them going, they had a long story to tell.

"Say, Father, do you remember any big sign about the tourist's camping grounds at Dow City?"

"No, don't believe I ever saw one."

"Neither did I. It must be a new one, on the Black and White —"

"Where the Mayville seven miles sign is, you know."

"Oh, on the Clarion crossroad, eh?"

"Well, that made me think we'd come too far, so I turned off there. We went and went till we were sure we were lost, so we stopped near a farmyard, and had some lunch, and —"

"And the farmer found us — Mr. Bingham — and invited us in to breakfast —"

"And he's got a lot of berries coming ripe next week, and we've got the job picking them, if — if —"

"If you'll let me have Old Dan to drive us back and forth?"

"We'd pay you for the use of him, Mr. Munson, of course."

"Just take good care of him; that's all I ask, Reddy," Mr. Munson replied. "The old fellow might as well be jogging along the roads as lolling around

in a pasture or stall, provided he isn't overdriven, or left too long without water, and is taken care of in such ways."

"Hurray for Mr. Munson!"

"Hip-hip-hip-hurray!"

"And hurray for Old Dan!"

"And Mrs. Munson and the lunch!"

"And the biscuit and honey!"

"Hip-hip-hip-hurray! Hip-hurray! Hurray!"

"Thank you, boys. Glad you enjoyed it. Anyway, just see what I got out of it, too," and she pointed to the bowl of lilies.

"Oh, yes, An auto went past us awful fast, Mr. Munson —"

"And Old Dan started to run, and everybody nearly got ditched —"

"And we lost our can of bait, and our extra hooks in it!"

"And Reddy caught a bullhead with-

out a hook — just tied a big clam on the end of his line, when he lost the only hook he had —"

"And when the bullhead nabbed it he was caught for sure!"

"So we had fried fish for dinner, anyway."

"But the car nearly got ditched, too, it was going so fast."

"What kind of car was it?" Mr. Munson seemed more interested than ever, but in a different way — without the smile in his kind eyes, with a very wide-awake look there instead.

"Oh, we don't know what kind, nor anything about the other one that went roaring along the Black-and-White afterward —"

"Only Old Dan didn't run that time, 'cause that was after we turned off it and got lost, and ended up at the farmer's finally."

"Then there were *two* cars?"

"Yes, going awful fast, lickety-split, like they were racing across the whole United States."

"Jasper! You don't suppose these infants—"

"There, Mother, of course not. At least, no need to worry about it now, since they're home safe.

"O Mrs. Munson, the fellows in the car, the first one, I mean, came lots nearer tipping over than we did!"

"You see, they hit the ditch and then came bouncing up over the end of the culvert, and just missed going over. They yelled something at us, and went on lickety-split."

"But they lost out a big black bag. Billy found it."

"It must-a jounced out when they hit—"

"What's that?"

The five stared at Mr. Munson's sharp question, but he went right on asking more in the same excited fashion.

"A big black bag? You say Billy found it in the road? Where is it?"

"In the buggy," chimed the quintette.

"With the flour, and bran, and basket, and trunks, and other things," added Windy.

Mrs. Munson stared at her husband, and he stared at her. Then the questions began again.

"But how did you find it? How did you come by it?"

"Why, when Billy ran back to look for our can of bait that jounced out, he found it in the road."

"We didn't hurt it, honestly, Mr. Munson."

"Honestly, Father, we've taken good care of it all day, and haven't touched a thing in it."

"Only peeked in to see what was in it, after we got it up in the wagon.

"It wasn't locked, you see."

"We could see in 'cause the moon was bright as day."

"Moon! You mean to say you were seven miles from Mayville by moonlight?"

So they had to tell all about their early start, which brought them back to the bag.

"Nothing in it but papers, though."

"At least, that's all we saw when we peeked in that one time. We haven't looked in since, being so busy; and anyway, they're just folded up, like traveling man's papers."

"Papers, you say?" Mr. Munson sprang to his feet. "Well, we'll just have that bag in here and get a look inside. No, I'll get it; you finish those biscuits while they're hot. You see,

boys, you're not the only Mayvillians that have been having some excitement today, beginning in the night. We've all been more or less excited and upset — we stay-at-homes."

"What's that?"

The boys stared at each other, while Mr. Munson went hurrying out. "That old horse!" they wirelessed each other.

"Was it a runaway, then? Was anyone hurt?" Windy asked for them all.

"No, not a runaway, exactly; more of a get-away, you might say," she replied. "And no one was hurt, and they were caught. But to think that you boys were alone! It frightens me to think of it."

"Oh, we weren't in any danger; we were out of the boat by then."

"Even out of the river, and dressed. Reddy heard the old horse, down in the bayou above the mill —"

"The old horse! The bayou!"

"You remember, Mother, the one between the big bridge and the little one, before you get to the mill?"

"And we got there just in time to save his life."

"Yes, and honestly, Mrs. Munson, we *had* to cut the traces to get him loose."

"He'd-a drownded if we hadn't-a done it, Mother."

"So we wrote a note to explain that, and the miller said he'd tell the folks that own the rig all about it when they come to claim the old horse and buggy."

"You see, he was trying to get a drink, and got down and all tangled up in his lines and harness, and couldn't get out — and —"

"And couldn't keep his head out of the water, so we had to cut the traces to get him up."

Mrs. Munson was listening with much

interest to this new happening, but with a puzzled look on her face, too.

"But what does that have to do with the bag?"

"Why, nothing. We found the bag before we got to the mill."

"Before daylight, even."

"While the old horse drownding was this afternoon. But —"

In hurried Mr. Munson, with the familiar black leather bag that had been with the boys since that moonlight moment of the early morning when Billy had come waddling down the road with it in his arms — with them, but often out of their minds altogether, so unimportant did they consider it as compared with other more exciting affairs of the day. Having accepted it as a chance find, and intending to use it in common for packing their belongings in whenever they went awandering with Old Dan and

the spring wagon, unless some one should claim it, of course — to them it was already a bit of Gang property.

"Unlocked, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"We looked in, 'cause we thought if any one ever claimed it we'd need to know what was inside to make 'em identify it right."

Mr. Munson set the bag on the table, under the light. The boys, certain of what he would find, yet interested anew because Mr. Munson seemed to be so concerned over it, watched him from over big bites of biscuit and honey.

Mr. Munson took one look inside, then nodded to his wife.

"It's it, all right."

Then to the wondering-eyed five: "You say Billy found this bag, boys?"

"Jasper! Just think of it! These children — alone!"

"Yes, sir, in the road —"

"When he ran back to look for —"

"It'd jounced out, you see, when they hit —"

"Then, Mr. William Turner Ballou, the Mayville State Bank has five hundred dollars for you whenever you find it convenient to call for the reward!"

"Reward!"

"Five — hundred!"

It was their eyes as much as their voices that uttered the astonished exclamations.

"Just take a good look at these papers by electric light, boys."

Mr. Munson held up a package of them, and then they saw they were not just ordinary forms, or traveling man's stuff. They were crispy, and much stamped in gay colors.

"But it isn't money!"

"Liberty Bonds."

"Liberty Bonds! Why, where —"

"Yes, Liberty Bonds, over fifty thousand dollars worth of them, belonging to citizens of Mayville. Some to your own fathers."

"But how?"

"This way," explained Mr. Munson. "Those two men robbed the Mayville State Bank early this morning. Probably just about the time you were starting out of Mayville they were sneaking into the bank. They were making their get-away in an auto, but lost this bag of bonds when they passed you. The sheriff was hot on their trail, and his was no doubt the second speeding auto you saw on the Black-and-White Trail last night, or rather early this morning."

"Say, it's sure lucky we got an early start."

"Then it was Sheriff Meining's car we saw this morning!"

"How's that?"

"A car was going along the Black-and-White this morning toward Mayville when we were getting back into the trail from Farmer Bingham's road."

"Tiny said then he thought it was Sheriff Meining's car."

"Raced the robbers, but missed the sheriff both ways!" gasped Mrs. Munson weakly.

"No doubt Tiny was right, because the sheriff and his posse caught the men the other side of Dow City. They had the currency in one bag, which the sheriff got all right. But this one — they told about losing it somewhere on the road, but the officers didn't know whether to believe them or not. They were inclined to think the men had hidden it, though why they hadn't hidden the money, too, Sheriff Meining couldn't explain. Anyway, the bank

offered the reward, and it's yours, Billy. Also the bag."

"Mine! No-sir-ee! Not just mine!" cried Billy, white with excitement except blue eyes that were big and dark and shining as large jet buttons. "You see, Mr. Munson, I only happened on it, looking for the can of bait. We're all buddies in the *re*-ward, and it's got to be divided among us, even, in five parts."

And so it happened that, in addition to having a day chockful of interesting experiences to remember, each one of the Gang now has one hundred dollars deposited to his credit in the Mayville State Bank, earning interest for him until he is ready to use it all in going to college, or in starting a business, or anything else equally important for a young man. The Gang also possesses a fine black leather traveling bag to take along

on all its outings, whether to carry swimming trunks, turtles, pearls, water lilies, carnelians, or whatever else they choose to put into it.

And did they pick berries for young Farmer Bingham as they had agreed? Certainly, for what boy of honor ever goes back on a promise?